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Modern biography

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THESIS

MODERN BIOGRAPHY

Submitted by

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INTRODUCTION

The field of Modern Biography is so wide and uncertain that an attempt to cover too large an area in a work such as this is deemed to me to be unwise.

I am, therefore, imitating the experienced guide. He enthuses his party by showing only the most important objects for which his museum is world famous.

In like manner, I am presenting only the most significant qualities of Modern Biography.

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BACKGROUND OF MODERN BIOGRAPHY

In every field of learning the novice begins by studying its history. The best way to understand the present is by studying the past. These old sayings contain bits of wisdom compressed by centuries of time. Since I believe that the finest approach to our present study is by a review of the past in biography, I am presenting a brief but comprehensive history of biography.

"Why", is one of the royal roads to wisdom--so have the sages of antiquity informed us and rightly. What better beginning to this fascinating, yes, almost enchanting study of biography is there than to sound its purpose? And what truer notes are there in the biographical scale than those from that unequalled master, Sir Sidney Lee? He strikes a mighty harmonious chord in the following simple combination. "The aim of biography is, in general terms, to hand down to a future age the history of individual men or women, to transmit enduringly their character and exploits." 1.

From the day that man learned to write, biographical notes and sketches appeared on the horizon. Second to that basic instinct of self-preservation man

1. Lee, Sir Sidney, "Principles of Biography", Page 8

possesses a strong inclination to reproduce. This is a matter of the intellect as well as of the flesh and blood. Every man wants to be remembered. To be utterly forgotten is as distasteful to a normal man as it is for him to be physically handicapped. Men want "to leave footprints in the sands of time." As soon as a man reaches an intellectual level higher than his associates, he feels the urge to reproduce or give his thoughts and ideas to the world. This the psychologists would explain is but a means of self-expression. Down through the ages from primitive man with his crude symbols on rocks to modern man with his huge gluttonous printing presses, the desire for expression is paramount. And, so long as men crave to express themselves, other men will write of their genius, and biography will always be one of the cherished possessions of mankind.

Another reason for the increasing popularity of biography is its commemorative function. This is but the natural outcome of the preceding paragraph. With the dawn of the recorded word, poets and lyrists first used their catchy verses and rhyming lines to immortalize the heroes who had distinguished themselves in bravery and in virtue. As time sped relentlessly on, this human tendency became more refined and more systematic. At present, the

number of biographies on the literary market is ample proof of the development of this natural instinct.

Sir Sidney Lee, who probably read and wrote more "Lives" in his time than any other biographer, expresses this point in his usual comprehensive and condensed style in the following paragraph:

> "Biography exists to satisfy a natural instinct in man--the commemorative instinct--the universal desire to keep alive the memories of those who by character and exploits have distinguished themselves from the masses of mankind. Art, pictorial, plastic, monumental art, competes with biography in preserving memories of buried humanity." 1.

Most of the records of antiquity have been buried with the ages. Luckily, fragments of biographical worth from times immemorial have been saved from the wrath of the centuries and may be found in the aged manuscripts of biblical days and in some of the irreplaceable books of China, Egypt, and the Orient. Not discounting the intrinsic value of these precious testimonials of the progress of mankind, for our purposes, the first biography of any importance that escaped oblivion was "Plutarch's Lives."

Plutarch was a Greek who flourished in the latter half of the first century. He wrote his "Lives"

1. Lee, Sir Sidney, "Principles of Biography", Page 7

so interestingly and with such a keen psychological insight that they are very much alive today. They are equally as popular in this modern world as they were centuries ago. His "Lives" were popularly called the "Parallel Lives", because of the treatment of his heroes in pairs. After portraying, for example, the ups and downs of Demosthenes, a Greek orator, he would then depict the struggles of a Roman one, Cicero, as his parallel. In the conclusions of his portrayals, Plutarch would compare the two men giving the most outstanding points of difference between them.

Plutarch's learning is staggering. His allusions, his use of sayings which were current in his time, his quotations from ancient poets, his gossip about the great men is astounding. What modern biographer could equal Plutarch in his learning and knowledge? To cap this, nowhere do we find that he ever boasts about his erudition.

In addition to his prolific book learning he had much first-hand experience both in Greece and in Rome. It is true that he was born in the district of Boetia, Greece, but fortunately for him he was able to spend much of his early life in Rome.

In writing his biographies, he was very negligent about dates. He disregarded chronological order and wrote in topical fashion. Despite these apparent disadvantages, you feel after reading his sketches that all the worthwhile facts about his heroes have been given. He was more interested in the jests of men than in their bloody victories on the field of battle. He says, "My design is not to write histories but lives." [1]

Plutarch was a moralist and loved to preach the good that men can do, and how by being virtuous all kinds of disadvantages could be surmounted. A good example of this teaching is found in the beginning of the life of Coriolanus:

> "Gaius Marcius, of whom I now write, being left an orphan, and brought up under the widowhood of his mother, has shown us by experience, that, although the early loss of a father may be attended with other disadvantages, yet it can hinder none from being either virtuous or eminent in the world, and that it is no obstacle to true goodness and excellence; however, bad men may be pleased to lay the blame of their corruptions upon the misfortune and the neglect of them in their minority." [2]

Plutarch gave biography a good start towards the place in Literature that it now maintains. Plutarch's contribution to the Art of Biography is admirably stated by Mr. Thayer when he says, "He reached the point of

1. Hyde, Marietta A.,"Modern Biography",Page XVI
2. Plutarch,"Lives of Illustrious Men",Page 336

defining each individual very clearly. He had a most catholic interest in many types of persons, and in the case of public men showed how far individual qualities effected their public actions. As you first read the long series of his "Lives" you have an impression not unlike that which comes to you when you first walk through the Hall of Busts at the Naples Museum but when you stop to examine and to compare, you discover that each differs from the others, that each face has its own features." [1.]

"Plutarch's Lives" were imitated by others of inferior ability but these neophytes did not add or improve this art; they blotched. Even the lives of the Caesars by Suetonius, valuable as they are historically, contributed practically nothing biographically.

The fourth century produced a man that was destined to become one of the staunchest fighters for Christianity that the world has ever seen. This man was Saint Jerome. He was born in the vicinity of the year 346 in the village of Stridon, in Dalmatia. This small town situated in the very midst of wild races and barbarous people probably endowed this Holy Father with his rugged nature which quality was wholly foreign to the sunny balmy soil of Italy.

1. Thayer, William R., "The Art of Biography", Page 21

Because Jerome's family was a Christian one and in favorable circumstances, the lad was sent to finish his studies under the famous teacher, Donatus, who resided in Rome at that time. Here the lad learned the classical subjects of the day and was in due time called to the Bar where he distinguished himself in eloquence and in wisdom.

Jerome was still a young man living in Rome when many political changes took place which were of extreme importance to the Christian Church. Paganism again triumphed for a brief term under the haughty emperor Julian, only to be replaced again by Christianity. Events were in turmoil, blood ran freely in the streets, licentiousness and vice were everywhere, corruption was rotting the government to the core--such were the conditions in Rome at that time.

In the midst of this decaying luxuriousness Jerome entered the service of the Christian Church. This act was not the consequence of a sudden call from Heaven, but rather the result of serious contemplation; for being a brilliant student and having an aptitude for concentrated study, he decided to live the life of a Christian Father in order to escape the puerilities and hollowness of the world around him.

Fortunately for the young Christian Religion that such a strong character entered its ranks at this time. Up to his day the Christian Religion was only welcome and practiced by the poorer classes of Rome. With Jerome in the saddle, Christianity was able to penetrate into the higher classes for the first time. When even a cursory glance at the conditions in Rome shows nothing but idleness and extravagances, a less noble character than Jerome would have been defeated in this worthy task.

Mrs. Martin sums up the character of this unusual figure in colorful language when she says, "...One name which has for fifteen centuries the marvellous power of enchanting both the minds and hearts of men in a superlative degree, and in the history of the Christian Church filling a place second only in importance and interest to that of the Apostles themselves, it is surely that of Jerome, the humble Dalmatian priest, who by the magic spell of his incomparable genius and ardent holiness, grouped around his own personality all the various and conflicting elements of that extraordinary fourth century of the Christian era." 1.

In the annals of church biography, Saint Jerome occupies an unique place. In Bethlehem in the year 492,

1. Martin, Mrs. Charles,"Life of Saint Jerome",Page 2

indeed, a very strained one for the Christian Church, Saint Jerome wrote an important literary creation called, "Lives of Illustrious Men". It contains one hundred and thirty-five famous church figures beginning with Simon Peter and ending with Jerome the Presbyter. The author in his preface states that his purpose in writing such a mass of material is "to show the heretics how many and how excelled writers there were among the Christians". [1.]

The person who really pushed St. Jerome to undertake this tremendous piece of work was his friend Dexter. St. Jerome begins his biographical writing using for his models that Greek Historian and Biographer Suetonius; later on he imitates other Greek and Latin biographical models including also Cicero's, "Brutus".

Jerome started out as he states in his preface to include only those who had written about the Holy Scriptures, but he seemed to forget his original intention and inserted all those who had written on topics of a theological nature. His list includes Heretics, Greeks, Syrians, Jews, and even Heathens. His work had to be entirely original for he had no predecessor. He did, however, use a volume by Eusebius entitled, "Church History", from which he copied much material. The editors of the

1. Jerome, "Lives of Illustrious Men","The Nicene and Post--Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church",Vol.III Page 356

translation say, "The first part of his work is taken almost entirely from Eusebius." [1]

Jerome did not have a scientific purpose in mind when writing his "Lives". His idea was to present to his readers a little information about church writers not generally known at that time. Careful study reveals that he kept well within his plan for when he reaches better known men like Cyprian, he makes little comment when he has at his disposal enough material to become prolix.

A careful study of Jerome's works shows that it was hastily constructed, that it contains many facts, and that it lacks even a resemblance of style. The following biographical sketch is a good example of this clergyman's writing:

Chapter XXVI [2]

"Isaac wrote "On the Holy Trinity" and a book "On the incarnation of the Lord", writing in a very obscure style of argument and involved language, maintaining that three persons exist in one Deity, in such wise that any thing may be peculiar to each which another does not have, that is to say, that the Father has this peculiarity that He, himself without Source, is the Source of others, that the Son, has this peculiarity, that begotten, He is not posterior to the begetter, that the Holy Spirit has this peculiarity, that He is neither made nor begotten but nevertheless is from another. Of the incarnation of the Lord indeed, he writes that the person of the Son of God is believed to be one, while yet there are two

1. "The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church", Vol. III Page 356
2. "The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church", Vol. III Page 391

natures existing in him."

Another famous name and closely related to Jerome's is Gennadius for he continued this work of writing "Lives of the Illustrious" in the year about 480. Gennadius writes just as irregular, is equally bare in style and composition as his predecessor. At times, he is, however, a little more original rising to the pitch of becoming interestingly critical.

The editors of the translation feel that the works of these two men are valuable contribution to church biography. In their words; "This combined work of Jerome and Gennadius is unique and indispensable and in the history of early Christian Literature, giving as it does a chronological history in biographies of ecclesiastical literature to about the end of the fifth century." [1.]

From the fourth century to the Middle Ages the Saints were the most popular heroes, and so we find many biographies depicting the greatness of the soul and how holy it is to live a complete spiritual life. Many of these voluminous volumes are replete with beauty and aesthetic charm. Others are so fascinating that many a night could be profitably spent with them. Yet, the value of these saintly documents must ever be religious in

1. "The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church", Vol.III Page 353

preference to biographical. Their authors emphasized the performing of miracles to such an extent that the sense of reality so imperative to biography is entirely lost.

Resting for a moment in the twelfth century we must mention William of Malmesbury as having made an important contribution to biography. This biographer was one of the first to possess a conscious literary purpose. He rendered biography an immense service for he made a direct effort to free it from the shackles of monasticism and the traps of the older chronicles. He was one of the first recorders of "Lives" who possessed that invaluable mental trait of curiosity. In addition to this, he wrote in a pleasing style, composed his works fairly well, used imagination throughout his narrative, and very frequently burst out with bits of humor and mirth. Throughout his work we find spots colored with vivid detail which type of writing was totally absent from the pens of the early chroniclers.

The twelfth century can without repudiation be said to be the starting point where curiosity took birth in the brains of the biographers. Mr. Nicholson substantiates this point of view. In his clear language he says,

> "With the twelfth century comes one of the most potent factors in the development of biography, namely, the birth of curiosity. It was a premature birth, and curiosity, until the seventeenth century showed signs of arrested development." [1]

Geoffrey of Monmouth should also be mentioned at this time for in his works we find again that intangible but wholly necessary quality of curiosity. In his early chronicle we find a definite attempt made to show that curiosity can stimulate much interest in past events and characters without any additional necessity of adding praise to make it attractive reading.

Matthew Paris of St. Albans stands out in the thirteenth century as one who while penning his work resolved to tell the truth.

The fourteenth century was one of those centuries in which ideas, attitudes, and general outlooks on life changed. It was the age of romance. The influence of the great French Court was felt all over the Continent even penetrating into England.

This century was a transition period in English history. Patriotism declined and consequently hagiography declined with it. Fiction beating off non-fiction began

1. Nicolson, Harold G.,"Development of English Biography", Page 22

to charm the English Court. The chronicles depicting the lives of the Saints became shorter and shorter. Public opinion showed that it was only interested in the immediate things of life; and scholasticism and not religion was the product of the monasteries.

Chaucer was the only worthwhile intellectual force during this romantic era. He possessed curiosity, sympathy, humor, composition, and had a great genius for selection of details in writing. But unfortunately for us he did not write biography, for his countrymen were not interested in the lives of real men--they were interested in romances.

The century following this was the most disappointing one in English history. It was intellectually blank in contrast to Italy and France where the first flow of Humanism had been reached. The Continent was stirring with the rebirth of knowledge. The dawn of the Rennaissance was here.

For the sake of curiosity we should voyage to Italy to see what the greatest man of letters in this new humanistic period did for biography. The name of this scholar was Francesco Petrarca or better known as Petrarch.

To neglect him is to throw aside the key to understand the progress of European Culture since the Middle Ages. He was the first Modern Scholar and the Father of the Rennaissance. One great Italian critic, Carducci, even proposed to place him on the same level with Erasmus and Voltaire. We must, however, give due credit to this venerable Italian thinker. Great authorities unanimously declare that he not only dominated the intellectual world of his own age but that he has directed men's thinking into new channels for many generations to come. James Harvey Robinson, the eminent historian, and his collaborator, Henry Winchester Rolfe, say, "His was the most potent individual influence in changing the whole trend of intellectual pursuits, not only in his own country but ultimately in Europe at large." [1.]

Petrarch was born in exile in Arezzo in 1304. His parents were originally Florentines but were banished on the same date that Dante was--the twenty-seventh of January, 1302. Petrarch spent most of his early life in universities such as Montpellier and Bologna. Having a great propensity to write he soon turned all of his energies to literary endeavors. So remarkable were his results that he was crowned poet laureate in Rome at the surprisingly youthful age of thirty-seven. He lived to

1. Robinson, James Harvey,
Rolfe, Henry Winchester, "Petrarch", Page 11

be seventy years of age dying with his face bowed down in a book.

One of Petrarch's famous literary accomplishments was his "Lives of Famous Men". This biographical enterprise has apparently outlived its usefulness. Not until 1874 was a modern printing of it made by A.Razzolini, Bologna, and then only in Italian. It has never been translated into English.

In his last days Petrarch wrote a short charming account of himself covering only forty-two years of his long active life. This he condensed into twenty pages. If he had only continued this absorbing narrative and enlarged upon it, he probably would have given posterity one of its greatest autobiographies. The following extract gives an unusual insight into the man's character and his style of writing:

> "I have taken pride in others, never in myself, and however insignificant I may have been, I have always been still less important in my own judgment. My anger has very often injured myself, but never others. I have always been most desirous of honourable friendships, and have faithfully cherished them. I make this boast without fear, since I am confident that I speak truly. While I am very prone to take offence, I am equally quick to forget injuries, and have a memory tenacious of benefits. In my familiar associations with kings and princes, and in my friendship with noble personages, my good fortune has been such as to excite envy.

> But it is the cruel fate of those who are growing old that they can commonly only weep for friends who have passed away. The greatest kings of this age have loved and courted me. They may know why; I certainly do not. With some of them I was on such terms that they seemed in a certain sense my guests rather than I theirs; their lofty position in no way embarassing me, but, in the contrary, bringing with it many advantages. I fled, however, from many of those to whom I was greatly attached; and such was my innate longing for liberty, that I studiously avoided those whose very name seemed incompatible with the freedom that I loved." 1.

It is important for us to know that Petrarch even believed that the writing of biography was worthy of his attention. It is true that he did not succeed in consummating any biographical masterpiece. This but shows the greatness and difficulty of the art. It was still in its embryo waiting for the real biographical artists to bring it out into full blossom.

In leaving Petrarch, let us carry away the thought that this "Father of Humanism" is more famous for his letter writing and independent thinking than for that early piece of biographical writing that came from his tireless pen.

In the fifteenth century we find biographers singing the praises of kings and statesmen. This change signifies the new attitude toward those to be idolized.

1. Robinson, James Harvey, "Petrarch", Page 63
   Rolfe, Henry Winchester,

But I shall not stop to analyze them for their importance is principally historical.

Returning to England we discover that the "Life of Cardinal Wolsey", written by his Gentleman Usher, George Cavendish, is the next important piece of biographical writing that should be considered. Wolsey was one of England's greatest statesmen of the sixteenth century. In addition to being an ecclesiastic he was the chief adviser to Henry VIII. Men like Wolsey can be compared to Richelieu of France. These Cardinals were powerful and dominating and served in two capacities, as laymen on one side and as churchmen on the other.

This dramatic biography is filled with personal data about Wolsey. Whoever reads it for political information and for a steady narration of events will be disappointed. But in biographical value it is rich and glorious. Here you can trace that wonderful ascent of a humble butcher's boy until you see him in that singular position of Cardinal in 1515. It took fifteen hundred years but at last a biography was written which portrayed the baffling crises of a career that was unique and extraordinary. The language employed was vivid and touching, thus giving more life to the book.

Briefly speaking, Cavendish tries and succeeds in this work to reveal the very intimate relationship of Wolsey with that vicious, fiendish and conceited Monarch Henry VIII. There are many memorial passages, some so great that even Shakespeare borrowed and by his magic touch made use of them in his play Henry VIII. But the most gripping and unforgettable passages must ever be those in which the skillful and sympathetic pen of Cavendish keenly and sensitively depicts the downfall and gradual withering away of his master. The brief extract that follows only hints at the dramatic episodes vividly portrayed throughout the book:

> " 'Master Kingston, farewell. I can no more, but wish all things to have good success. My time draweth on fast. I may not tarry with you. And forget not, I pray you, what I have said and charged you withal: for when I am dead, ye shall peradventure remember my words much better.' And even with these words he began to draw his speech at length, and his tongue to fail; his eyes being set in his head, whose sight failed him. Then we began to put him in remembrance of Christ's passion; and sent for the abbot of the place to anneal him, who came with all speed, and ministered unto him all the service to the same belonging; and caused also the guard to stand by, both to hear him talk before his death, and also to witness of the same; and incontinent the clock struck eight, at which time he gave up the ghost, and thus departed he this present life. And calling to our remembrance his words, the day before, how he said that at eight of the clock we should lose our master, one of us looking upon an other, supposing that he prophesied of his departure." 1.

The one outstanding feature about Cavendish's

1. Cavendish, George, "Life of Cardinal Wolsey", Page 392

portrayal is his sensitiveness to personal details. Mr. Thayer in his usual forceful way says on this point,

> "Altho, Cavendish can hardly be claimed as an innovator in biography, those passages of his which I refer to show that he was sensitive to the importance of personal details--a direction in which the art was to develop until it reached its highest expression." [1.]

Cavendish was followed by a motley group of biographers who wrote voluminously, and unwittingly copying his meandering style. You felt as if the biographer sat down with you for a tête à tête about his subject. At first, he would talk at length on one phase of his life, then suddenly, when a bright or important thought hit him, he would without warning quickly digress and begin to point out another incident or event that appealed to him. He was as indifferent to time as he was without regard to sequence of events. Yet the biographers continued to display their heroes in this fashion--and all because the public accepted this style of writing as the approved form.

Before passing to the next milestone it would be good form to give Mr. Thayer's reaction to Wolsey's "Life". "To have inspired Shakespeare would save Cavendish from oblivion, but the actual worth of the biography will keep it alive as long as men prize genuine fragments of human life and tragic fortune." [2.]

1. Thayer, William R., "The Art of Biography", Page 69
2. " " " " " " " Page 72

In 1791 the literary world saw the birth of what is probably the best biography ever written. This was Boswell's "Life of Johnson". One hundred and thirty nine years have passed and yet Dr. Johnson continues to be an old acquaintance of every educated person using the English tongue. The principal cause for this popularity lies in the superb art of his biographer-Boswell. Some incredulous dilettantes will pour forth verbose reasons to the effect that the genius of Sam Johnson alone, regardless who transcribed his life, was enough to preserve him for posterity. But do these desultory literary imbibers know that the world has seen many geniuses before and after Johnson's time and yet they are scarcely known except to the intellectual élite? It is that subtle and marvelous art of the biographer that will determine a great man's popularity after his demise.

Peering deeper into Boswell's art in order to determine the underlying causes why his masterpiece "is the culmination" [1.] in the Art of Biography, the most striking feature seems to be its richness in personal data. Boswell worked for years on "Johnson's Life", collecting scraps day by day. Above all he determined that Dr. Johnson's rare gift of conversation should not be lost to the coming generations. It is said that each night he

1. Thayer, William R., "The Art of Biography",Page 99

recorded faithfully the wit of that genius.

Wherever we turn to in Boswell's biographical masterpiece we find richness of personal data. The following incident is both exemplary and amusing:

> "And now I am to give a pretty full account of one of the most curious incidents from Johnson's life, of which he himself has made the following minute on this day: 'In my return from church, I was accosted by Edwards; I did not at first recollect the name, but gradually as we walked along, recovered it and told him a conversation that had passed at an ale-house between us. My purpose is to continue our acquaintance'." [1]

A second quality that adds to the greatness of the work is his absolute honesty in the portrayal of that many sided genius whom he loved so well. Boswell said,

> "I have sometimes been obliged to run half over London, in order to fix a date correctly, which when I had done accomplished, I well knew would bring me no praise, though a failure would have been to my discredit." [2]

In the following extract taken from the beginning of his narrative we see the sincerity of Boswell cropping forth again:

> "Let me hear apologize for the imperfect manner in which I am obliged to exhibit Johnson's conversation at this period. In the early part of my acquaintance with him I was so wrapped in admiration of his extraordinary colloquial talents, and so little accustomed to his peculiar mode of expression, that I found it extremely difficult to recollect and record his conversation with its genuine vigor and vivacity. In progress of time, when my mind was, as it were, STRONGLY IMPREGNATED WITH THE JOHNSONIAN AETHER, I could, with much

1. Boswell, James, "Life of Johnson", Page 384

2. Hyde, Marietta A., "Modern Biography", Page XIX

> facility and exactness, carry my memory and commit to paper the exuberant variety of his wisdom and wit." 1.

Continuing our search for more of Boswell's virtues, we find much to entertain our thinking. Boswell knew Johnson so well that every virtue, every fault, every eccentricity was recorded by his highly sensitive nature. But being a true artist, he did not put everything "hoch poch" into his book. He sifted, weighed and chose very carefully only the essential details. In reading his exposition you get a complete picture without any distortion. Johnson appears real and lifelike. Now add to this a style that is so clear and so simple that the language quickly fades from view leaving only the episode fresh in your memory. Surely these notable qualities alone are enough to make any piece of biographical writing a masterpiece.

The following conversation between Johnson and Boswell is both informing and typical of what transpires when these two unusual figures get together:

> "I introduced the topic, which is often ignorantly urged, that the Universities of England are too rich; so that learning does not flourish in them as it would do, if those who teach had smaller salaries, and depended on their assiduity for a great part of their income. Johnson: 'Sir, the very reverse of this is the truth; the English Universities are not rich enough. Our fellowships are only sufficient to support a man during his studies to fit him for the world, and accordingly

1 Boswell, James, "Life of Johnson", Page 116

in general they are held no longer than till an opportunity offers of getting away. Now and then, perhaps, there is a fellow who grows old in his college; but this is against his will, unless he be a man very indolent indeed. A hundred a year is reckoned a good fellowship, and that is no more than is necessary to keep a man decently as a scholar. We do not allow our fellows to marry, because we consider academical institutions as preparatory to a settlement of the world. It is only by being employed as a tutor, that a fellow can obtain anything more than a livelihood. To be sure, a man, who has enough without teaching, will probably not teach; for we would all be idle if we could. In the same manner, a man, who is to get nothing by teaching, will not exert himself'."..... 1.

Finally, we must not overlook Dr. Johnson himself. His crushing and quick wit, his dramatic personality, his beautiful spirit clothed in a body so uncouth as at times to be unbearable, his extensive and almost colossal knowledge--these qualities mixed with many more did make him a good subject for biography.

In addition to all this Johnson was a prodigious letter writer. Many of his letters are to be found in Boswell's masterpiece. The following short letter is a good example of his clear style: 2.

To James Boswell, Esq.

Dear Sir,

Presently after I had sent away my last letter, I received your kind medical packet. I am very much obliged both to you and your physicians for your kind attention to my disease. Dr. Gillespie has sent me an excellent consilium medicum, all solid practical experimental knowledge. I am at present, in the opinion of my physicians,

1. Boswell, James, "Life of Johnson", Page 291

2. " " " " " Page 512

(Dr. Heberden and Dr. Brocklesby) as well as my own, going on very hopefully. I have just begun to take vinegar of squills. The powder hurt my stomach so much, that it could not be continued.

Return Sir Alexander Dick my sincere thanks for his kind letter; and bring with you the rhubarb which he so tenderly offers me.

I hope dear Mrs. Boswell is now quite well, and that no evil, either real or imaginary, now disturbs you.

I am, &c.
Sam. Johnson.

London, March 2,1784.

Mr. Thayer in his usual forceful manner sums up why Boswell's masterpiece is the culmination:

"It gave for the first time a complete account of a human being. In it we have not merely the external man and a narration of his acts, but the inside as well as the outside, all adequate to the original. The wise Boswell does not use Johnson as a figure on whom to drape any theory or his own prejudice. His vision penetrates, not because he has an eager and keen mind which delights to exercise itself in such analysis, but because he has sympathy and love which not only see but understand. And, whether by intention or by intent, he commands a style which is a perfect medium for his thought. Finally, he has for a subject a creature strange, but with a strangeness which attracts everyone, and still, after these many many years, has not worn out the world's interest." 1.

In the nineteenth century many changes took place in the world. The most striking were the great advances in the Sciences, and the adoption of the scientific method in examination of all things. Men began to study other men as dispassionately as they analyzed chemicals. This search for truth had a structual effect

1. Thayer, William R., "The Art of Biography", Page 99

on biography. After 1870 most biographers showed a closer approach to actual life than those of any time previous.

Formerly, if a biographer were writing the life of a statesman, he put him in a mold already cast for him by tradition. The "Life" progressed along certain prescribed sign posts until the exalted position was reached.

This was particularly true of English Biography and for an excellent reason. The conservatism and tradition of English Culture required a man to move from one prescribed position to the next without deviation. The offices were created years ago and the men advanced according to schedule. Even in this modern day, Englishmen write about the Regius Professor at Oxford, the Archbishop of Canterbury and many other honorable posts created since the Middle Ages without even mentioning the occupant. Perhaps this is why Englishmen know their history so well, otherwise they would all be carting around huge history books to keep them informed who is the occupant of such and such an office of a particular year.

In America, because of the pioneering aspect of the country, the reverse was true. Here, there were no

grooves set for the men who later were to become famous. It was no uncommon event for a farmer to jump suddenly into the legislature. This, of course, had a significant effect on biography, for despite a biographer's traditional leanings, the very essence of American life forced him to pen a life that was conspicuously individual. Each case was widely different.

The English Biographer, on the other hand, only informed his readers what men were carrying on the traditions of the British Empire at a particular time. Naturally, in biographies such as these, you find less individuality than in the American ones where every man's life was a totally different problem.

Strange as it may seem, since Boswell gave to the world, perhaps, the perfect biography, many hundred have appeared but of such inferior workmanship as to cause you to wonder if biography like prosperity advances by cycles. Many of them utterly forgot his technique and clung to the traditional pattern.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw a decided increase in biographical writing of all sorts. To examine even a few of the varied ones is really

outside the scope of this thesis. However, since evolution never stops even at a perfect specimen like Boswell's, I shall for the remainder of this history touch briefly, the high spots of the most important modern biographies.

In 1836 one of the greatest biographies in the English language was published. This was Lockhart's, "Life of Scott". The author being Scott's son-in-law had the good fortune to draw from actual life much valuable intimate knowledge. He also had access to all of Scott's journals and letters. Despite the fact that Lockhart wrote it well using carefully chosen language, the book has one glaring defect--it is too long; the usual edition being in five volumes.

Perhaps we can advance excuses for Lockhart, for Scott was such a lovable and wonderful character to write about. However, we must admit that he lacks power of selection. He presents too much detail illustrating many times the same point. Mr. Thayer says on this point,

> "It added no new variety to the art, it is an admirable example of excellence without originality." 1.

The paragraph that follows is a good example of Lockhart's excellent language and careful composition:

> "In March, 1799, he carried his wife to London, this being the first time that he had seen

1. Thayer, William R.,"The Art of Biography",Page 112

> the metropolis since the days of his infancy. The acquaintance of Lewis served to introduce him to some literary and fashionable society, with which he was much amused; but his great anxiety was to examine the antiquities of the Tower and Westminster Abbey, and to make some researches among the MSS. of the British Museum. He found his Goetz spoken of favorably, on the whole, by the critics of the time; but it does not appear to have attracted the general attention. The truth is, that, to have given Goethe anything like a fair chance with the English public, his first drama ought to have been translated at least ten years before. The imitators had been more fortunate than the master; and this work, which constitutes one of the most important landmarks in the history of German literature, had not come even into Scott's hands, until he had familiarized himself with the ideas which it first opened, in the feeble and puny mimicries of writers already forgotten. He readily discovered the vast gulf which separated Goethe from the German dramatists on whom he had heretofore been employing himself; but the public in general drew no such distinctions, and the English Goetz was soon afterwards condemned to oblivion through the unsparing ridicule showered on whatever bore the name of German play, by the inimitable caricature of the Rovers." [1]

In 1859 Darwin's "Origin of the Species" was printed. Allowing for the elasticity of changes, this year in reality designated a new era. Science had grown from a weak babe to a young giant in worldly doings. People were becoming accustomed to the scientific method--the method of microscopic analysis. And instinctively they began to look for the same method in Literature, especially in fiction and in biography.

Biography did change considerably and the most striking example of this new method was John Morley's

1. Lockhart, J.G.,"Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.",Vol.I Page 232

studies of Voltaire and Rousseau. Morley presents a survey of the intellectual and spiritual development of his heroes. You find no chronological narration of external events and happenings but a penetrating criticism of their lives. After reading, the reaction is surprisingly positive, you feel the portrayal is evenly balanced. The following brief excerpt on Rousseau gives a substantial clue as to the author's procedure in analyzing his characters:

> "The future author of the most influential treatise on education that has even been written, was not successful in the practical and far arduous side of that master art. We have seen how little training he had ever given himself in the cardinal virtues of the collectedness and self-control, and we know this to be the indispensable quality in all who have to shape young minds for a humane life. So long as all went well, he was an angel, but when things went wrong, he is willing to confess that he was a devil. When his two pupils could not understand him, he became frantic; when they showed wilfullness or any other part of the disagreeable materials out of which, along with the rest, human excellence has to be ingeniously and painfully manufactured, he was ready to kill them. This, as he justly admits, was not the way to render them either well learned or sage..." [1.]

In contrast to Lockhart's biography in 1876 there was published a "Life of Macaulay", by Sir George Otto Trevelyan, of which Thayer says, "Second only to Boswell's Johnson". [2.] Here again, a goodly part of the charm of the book is due to Macaulay's amazing personality and to his masterfully written letters.

Macaulay's life was an unusually happy one.

1. Morley, John, "Rousseau", Page 95

2. Thayer, William R., "The Art of Biography", Page 138

Here was a man who could be happy alone, happy with his books, or with other people. Obviously, to read his life would be cheerful and inspirational. But due credit must be given to the artist Trevelyan. Macaulay's popularity was heightened in great measure by his biographer. He skillfully combined history with biography; he quoted just enough of Macaulay's letters to substantiate a point; his artistic leanings made him select his material with discretion. The result of this artistry--a complete portrayal of one of England's greatest men of letters equal to a Rembrandt. In the short extract below the limpid style of Trevelyan is easily felt:

> "Macaulay set forth on his journey within a week from his landing, travelling by night, and resting while the sun was at its hottest. He has recorded his first impressions of Hindostan in a series of journal letters addressed to his sister Margaret. The fresh and vivid character of those impressions,--the genuine and multiform interest excited in him by all that met his ear or eye,--explain the secret of the charm which enabled him in after days to overcome the distaste for Indian literature entertained by that personage who, for want of a better, goes by the name of the general reader. Macaulay reversed in his own case the experience of those countless writers on Indian themes who have successively blunted their pens against the passive indifference of the British public; for his faithful but brilliant studies of the history of our Eastern Empire are to this day incomparably the most popular of his works. It may be possible, without injury to the fame of the author, to present a few extracts from a correspondence, which is in some sort the raw material of productions that have already secured their place among our national classics." 1.

Our next and final step is Contemporary Biography.

1. Trevelyan, George Otto,"The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay",Vol.I Page 363

Of all the periods of biographical literature, this last one is the greatest, the most difficult to analyze, but without contradiction, the most fascinating. As yet, it is like a newly discovered island--very much unchartered.

The three names, I believe, that stand for the best that is being written today are André Maurois, Lytton Strachey and Gamaliel Bradford. The first, a Frenchman, author of "Ariel", "Disraeli", and "Lord Byron", is called by Arnold Bennett, "One of the chief European authorities on the Art and Science of Biography, if not the chief authority". The second, an Englishmen, author of "Eminent Victorians", "Queen Victoria", and "Elizabeth and Essex", is heralded by Maurois as the most outstanding contemporary biographer. The third, an American, author of "Bare Souls", "American Portraits", "Damaged Souls", "The Soul of Samuel Pepys", and "As God Made Them", is acclaimed as "the most notable biographer in the country, who uncovers more than any living man the richness and charm of our American heritage". [1.]

Not long ago, and this scene took place on a peaceful day while literary men and scholars were in agreement that they had seen the best in biography, a shot suddenly burst into their tranquil and sedate camp. This

shot was Strachey's, "Eminent Victorian". Soon followed another labelled "Queen Victoria".

The Victorian writers recorded lives for which they had great respect and admiration. But here a man like Strachey records a life like Queen Victoria's which did not even appeal to him. The result--a portrait so lifelike that as soon as you begin to read you are magically transplanted to the stage where the play is being enacted. Mr. Maurois in his vivid language says of Mr. Strachey's style, "There is nothing ponderous about Mr. Strachey's method. He does not criticise, he does not judge--he exposes. His procedure is that of the great humorists. The author never appears himself. He walks behind the queen, behind Cardinal Manning, behind General Gordon; with faithful exactitude he reproduces their gestures and their tricks of speech and so obtains excellent comic effects". [1.]

These new volumes by Strachey were so unlike their predecessors that people marvelled in bewilderment while savants nudged each other. Here for the first time was a man who fearlessly strove to present the complete truth. And whether we scrutinize those artistic studies by Maurois, or scan those portraits rich in American heri-

1. Maurois, André, "Aspects of Biography", Page 19

tage by Bradford, we discover those same remarkable qualities with which Modern Biography is so richly endowed.

The three most striking qualities that Modern Biography possesses are, in my opinion, (1) Its Search For Truth, (2) Its Evolution To A Work Of Art, (3) Its Recognition Of The Complexity Of Man. Because of the relative importance of these three characteristics, I shall devote a complete chapter to each one.

THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

Dr. Samuel Johnson said, "The value of every story depends on its being true. A story is a picture of an individual or of human nature in general: if it be false, it is a picture of nothing." 1. No matter where we turn, in the best of Modern Biography its search for truth makes a decided impression upon us.

But what does his search for truth mean? Does it mean to present all the facts that are known about a man's life? This would be impossible for then the book would have to be as long as life itself. Again, should the biography be like an enlarged obituary notice where nothing but praise is showered on the deceased? In every man's life enough can be found to write a long testimonial of praise. If we followed this latter plan, the facts would all be true but would we be telling the whole truth? No, there is more than one side to every man and the biographer should strive to portray all his different characteristics. To present the man's real character--this is the biographer's real job.

The Victorian novelists like Thackeray, Dickens, and Elliot gave Modern Biography a good start towards its

1. Maurois, André, "Aspects of Biography", Page 23

goal of truth. These writers portrayed characters in fiction that were human. Each of their creations was a real individual. Becky Sharpe, Mr. Micawber and others are just as real to us as our living friends. Herein lies the genius of these master writers.

The reading public being accustomed to lifelike characters naturally demanded heroes in biographies that were as much alive as their quasi-brethren in the novels.

Preceding this modern school sometimes called the "New School of Interpretative Biography," [1.] a very common notion prevailed that a biography written about a king should be "kingly". His life must be written to conform to a king's station with no regard paid to his character. He may have been an imbecile, an immoral licentious brute, no matter, a king must be portrayed with praise and credit showered on him while criticism and censure were blindly evaded.

In Modern Biography we find all degrees of this search for truth. In Mr. Strachey's work and in Mr. Maurois's the truth is given in all its glory, but in inferior volumes we still find only shades of this virtue. In fact, some volumes so distort the truth that the

1. Hyde, Marietta A., "Modern Biography", Page 20

reader begins to wonder if a halo surrounds the head of the hero. Mr. Thayer makes an interesting contribution when he says, "I read recently a book of General Robert E. Lee, which was so stuffed with virtues that I began to doubt the existence of any virtue, and only when the author stated that General Lee used to take his ease in a rocking chair, sitting in his stocking-feet, did I perceive that he was a real person." [1.]

The day of the traditional biography, that long documentary bit of writing has not yet passed from our midst. Nevertheless, the dawn of the new era has arrived and biographers are striving to convey complete truthful impressions. In this task they have much to contend with. In the past, the biographer simply brought forth events and then showed how his hero passed through them. The difficulties of the hero, his reactions, his relations with events--all this was left for the reader to judge. Modern biographers realize that the hero is really the center of interest and they stress only those incidents that have altered or influenced his development and growth.

This new procedure is a very delicate one and demands a sympathetic and open mind of the highest sort. Obviously, a biographer who has already stored up

1. Thayer, William R.,"The Art of Biography",Page 118

prejudices and preconceived notions about a character cannot pen a true portrait of his hero. The procedure of the modern writer is piquantly stated by Mr. Maurois in these words:

> "The modern biographer, if he is honest, will not allow himself to think: 'Here is a great king, a great statesman, a great writer; round his name a legend has been built; it is on the legend, and on the legend alone, that I wish to dwell.' No. He thinks rather, 'Here is a man. I possess a certain number of documents, a certain amount of evidence about him. I am going to draw a true portrait. What will this portrait be? I have no idea. I don't want to know before I have actually drawn it. I am prepared to accept whatever a prolonged contemplation of my subject may reveal to me, and to correct it in proportion to such new facts as I discover.' " 1.

If our modern recorder of "Lives" succeeds in this method, he produces a fine piece of writing, but if he fails, which is commonly due to the lack of a penetrating psychological insight and an unsympathetic touch, his result will be nothing but a travesty of the man.

Although men like Maurois, Nicolson, Strachey, Bradford and others have produced biographies that are delicately human, mixed with much good sense and discretion, astute critics condemn their methods. These perennial fault finders argue that no censure must be inscribed about our dear departed ones.

This weak contention brought forward by the

1. Maurois, André,"Aspects of Biography",Page 14

old order is nothing but a shield employed by a static order to preserve itself against the new. If a biographer carefully unravels the deficiencies of a man and then rewinds the threads anew until he becomes famous--is not this method more powerful and more convincing to the reader? Is it not a good moral lesson to show that genius is but human? Even a Disraeli can lose his temper, an Essex Commit follies, a Shelley send caustic letters. On the other hand, is not the result of these innovations but to make the hero even a greater one? It reveals to us a mortal man very much like ourselves, who through sheer force of character and persistence coupled with hard work reached the top.

In the extract below, which was picked at random, the genius of Mr. Strachey's method can easily be discerned. He condenses in a paragraph or two a complete picture of Cardinal Manning at the age of thirty-eight. Under the delicate handiwork of this biographer, the Cardinal begins to assume body and soul. In like manner, Mr. Strachey fills page after page with his artistry, exposing the worldliness and spiritual conflict of this venerable Apostle of the Roman Church:

> "In his archdeaconry, Manning lived to the full the active life of a country clergyman. His slim, athletic figure was seen everywhere--in the streets of Chichester, or on the lawns of

> the neighbouring rectories, or galloping over the downs in breeches and gaiters, or cutting brilliant figures on the ice. He was an excellent judge of horseflesh, and the pair of greys which drew his hooded phaeton so swiftly through the lanes were the admiration of the country. His features were already beginning to assume their ascetic caste, but the spirit of youth had not yet fled from them, so that he seemed to combine the attractions of dignity and grace. He was a good talker, a sympathetic listener, a man who understood the difficult art of preserving all the vigour of a manly character and yet never giving offence. No wonder that his sermons were crowded, no wonder that his spiritual advice was sought for eagerly by an ever-growing crowd of penitents, no wonder that men would say, when his name was mentioned, "Oh, Manning! No power on earth can keep <u>him</u> from a bishopric!" 1.

Every literate person has read something about Florence Nightingale, but has he ever been given the rare opportunity to penetrate into the depths of this unusual woman to discover her real character? In the following extract, we obtain, as it were, the privilege to pass into the innermost private confines of this very picturesque character of the Victorian age:

> "She arrived in England in a shattered state of health. The hardships and the ceaseless effort of the last two years had undermined her nervous system; her heart was pronounced to be affected; she suffered constantly from fainting fits and terrible attacks of utter physical prostration. The doctors declared that one thing alone would save her--a complete and prolonged rest. But that was also the one thing with which she would have nothing to do. She had never been in the habit of resting; why should she begin now? Now, when her opportunity had come at last; now, when the iron was hot, and it was time to strike? No; she had work to do; and, come what might, she would do it. The doctors protested in vain; in vain her family lamented and entreated, in vain her friends pointed out to her the madness of such

1. Strachey, Lytton,"Eminent Victorians",Page 44

> a course. Madness? Mad-possessed--perhaps she was. A demoniac frenzy had seized upon her. As she lay upon her sofa, gasping, she devoured blue-books, dictated letters, and, in the intervals of her palpitations, cracked her febrile jokes. For months at a stretch she never left her bed. For years she was in daily expectation of Death. But she would not rest. At this rate, the doctors assured her, even if she did not die, she would become an invalid for life. She could not help that; there was the work to be done; and, as for rest, very likely she might rest...when she had done it." 1.

The above extracts exemplifying this search for truth can be duplicated by the hundreds. I believe that the method used by the masters of this modern school in their search for TRUTH is legitimate and successful. We cannot expect a generation soaked in scientific principles to seek inspiration from biographies that are merely panegyrics. The heroes and heroines must be human. We should feel a common kinship for them and the closer this can be approached, the greater the biography will be. An unbiased reading of the best modern biographies reveals this common kinship.

1. Strachey, Lytton,"Eminent Victorians",Page 164

BIOGRAPHY AS A WORK OF ART

Francis Bacon said, "Ars est homo additus naturae." Our problem in this chapter is to prove that biography can be treated as a work of art and still live up to this definition. To many, it is a source of real embarrassment, but to artists like Maurois, Strachey, and Bradford it is but another way of expressing the beauty and the glory of Art.

Translating our definition of art, we find that the two qualities necessary for all aesthetic activity are "a picture of reality sufficiently far removed from us to relieve us of the desire to do something, and at the same time directed by a human will." [1.] However, to make a work of art out of the life of a human being is one of the most difficult tasks in the art world. It ranks with the greatest of the arts. Carlyle observed that a well written life is much rarer than a well lived one.

A human life can give us much aesthetic pleasure but it must be so "lightly linked to our own that as we contemplate it, we feel no moral impulse, no need of doing anything. We feel as if we were reading a novel." [2.] In case of a disaster in a novel, we read on without feeling

1. Maurois, Andre', "Aspects of Biography", Page 45
2. " " " " " Page 42

the need of helping our characters. Occasionally, many novelists kill this aesthetic pleasure because they force the reader to begin to solve the ethical problem. But this is not the artists' business.

Techekov understood this subtlety in art, and pointing out this distinction to his friend Suvorin, he says, "You are confusing two things: the solution and the correct statement of a problem. The artist is concerned only with the second. In Anna Karenina no problem is solved, but the book is completely satisfying since all the problems are well stated." [1.]

The fact that we know a novel is not a true narration of events and that the characters are fictitious, rests our minds from acting immediately. Herein, lies the aesthetic pleasure. Although the characters in a biography are true, one important feature saves it from losing this needed aesthetic pleasure. It is this--in a biography we know the result in advance. All of the hero's reverses and fortunes are known beforehand. We pleasantly review a life and events familiar to us. It can be compared to an enjoyable stroll in a beloved patch of woods where we went to revive sweet memories, and then to contemplate over our recollections.

1. Maurois, Andre', "Aspects of Biography", Page 43

The peace of mind derived from this enjoyable stroll gives us that aesthetic pleasure so necessary in every work of art.

The second quality of our definition--a reconstruction of nature by man is a very ticklish performance. In a novel, the artist creates his characters and makes them act on each other with machine-like precision. But the biographer--his task is a highly specialized one. To reconstruct a life that possessed a soul, brain, heart, flesh and blood is an intricate piece of work that only a master magician can perform.

The task of the biographer can be compared to the landscape artist. The latter, obviously cannot paint everything that a beautiful view reveals to him. He must choose the essential characteristics of the whole for his composition.

In like manner, his brother biographer should strive to perform the artist's function. He should also pick out only the essential characteristics of his heroes from the mass of material at his command and do this without weakening the whole perspective. Is not the following picture of Queen Victoria in her last days

worthy of an artist?

> "Victoria was the Queen of England, the Empress of India, the quintessential pivot round which the whole magnificent machine was revolving--but how much more besides! For one thing, she was of a great age--an almost indispensable qualification for popularity in England. She had given proof of one of the most admired characteristics of the race--persistent vitality. She had reigned for sixty years, and she was not out. And then, she was a character. The outlines of her nature were firmly drawn, and, even through the mists which envelop royalty, clearly visible. In the popular imagination her familiar figure filled, with satisfying ease, a distinct and memorable place. It was, besides, the kind of figure which naturally called forth the admiring sympathy of the great majority of the nation. Goodness they prized above every other human quality; and Victoria, who had said that she would be good at the age of twelve, had kept her word...." [1]

The first step in making a biography a work of art is to select the proper subject. Without hesitation, we may safely say that some lives are more beautiful than others; some by their very inherent composition seek beauty for self-expression; others through chance and environment grow into works of art. Shelley's life is a remarkable example of beauty, and is a perfect natural composition. Are not paragraphs like the following capable of instilling beauty in the reader?

> "Shelley closed his book, stretched himself out upon the sunny, flower-starred grass, and meditated on the misery of man. From the school buildings behind him a confused murmur of stupid voices floated out over the exquisite landscape of wood and stream, but here at least no mocking eye could spy upon him. The boy's tears ran down, and pressing his hands together he made this vow:

1. Strachey, Lytton, "Queen Victoria", Page 414

'I swear to be just and wise and free, if such power in me lies. I swear never to become an accomplice, even by my silence, of the selfish and the powerful. I swear to dedicate my whole life to the worship of beauty.' " 1.

"Shelley glided in, blushing like a girl, and holding out his two hands gave the sailor's a warm pressure. Trelawny looked at him with surprise. It was hard to believe that this flushed and artless face could be that of the genius and rebel, reviled as a monster in England, and whom the Lord Chancellor had deprived of his rights as a father. Shelley, on his side, admired Trelawny's bold, wild face, raven-black moustache, handsome half-Arab type. Both of them were so astounded they could find nothing to say. To relieve their embarrassment, Jane asked Shelley what book he had in his hand....

His face brightened and he answered briskly. 'Calderon's Magico Prodigioso. I am translating some passages in it.' " 2.

Everyone's life, no doubt could be pictured interestingly by the biographer, if he were only capable of analyzing it. But the biographer is not a writer of fiction; he must use nothing but documents, correct facts, and evidences that savour of authenticity. Since this is his only escape, he chooses men who have played an important part in world events. This explains the popularity of famous men from all walks of life as biographical portraits.

After the subject is well chosen, the best method in telling the story is to follow a consistent chronological order. As we have already observed, Plutarch and his followers did not adhere to this plan, but began immediately to recound the deeds of their heroes. André

1. Maurois, André, "Ariel The Life of Shelley", Page 7
2. " " " " " " " Page 289

Maurois of the modern school believes that it is extremely difficult to interest readers in facts which are not presented in their normal order. He says,

> "The romantic interest of a life springs from, first the anticipation of the future, from that finding of ourselves in the brink of the Abyss which is Tomorrow without any conception of what we shall find there. Even when the man is famous and the reader knows perfectly well that the hero is destined to become a great general or a great poet in the end, it seems rather absurd to tell him so in the first sentence of the book." [1.]

The new psychology adds a point in favor of the chronological order. Since we believe in the evolution of the individual spirit, we must be consistent, and also hold, that a man's character grows in proportion to the number of important contacts he makes with people and events. What manner of analyzing a man's life have we than through this normal order? Biography, if it is to be a work of art, must show progressively how external affairs affected the growth of the hero. In the superb masterpieces by the best modern artists, the chronological order is followed without any deviation.

The third important consideration in this problem is the choice of details. The more significant details of a man's behavior that a biographer can unearth, the clearer will the subject appear to the reader. How he combs his hair, how he converses, how he eats, and many

1. Maurois, Andre', "Aspects of Biography", Page 57

other simple daily habits that we all understand so well throws more light on his character than fifty carefully prepared letters. The following short extracts illustrate this point admirably--some high lights on Francis James Child by Mr. Bradford:

> "In more normal social relations with humanity, Child was generally responsive and always attractive. It is true that he was by nature shy and self-effacing. One of his colleagues tells of the amusement of seeing a pompous minor official stride across the Yard, forcing everybody out of his way, while little 'Stubby' Child trotted along with his bag of books, turning out for even an insignificant freshman."..... 1.

> "There was something gay and sprightly about his spirit, with all its refinement and reserve, something of the waywardness and elfishness of the old songs he so greatly loved, which sometimes showed in odd and playful freaks, as when with his three little girls he performed the ballad of 'Young Beichan' at a Christmas entertainment, or united with Lowell in the lyrical frolic of the 'Pesceballo.' " 2.

Since man is primarily a physical being, any trifling gesture carries more meaning to the reader than lengthy microscopic analysis. The biographer must make the hero relive his life for the enjoyment of the reader.

The final aspect of this discussion is whether biggraphy has a poetic value. Again, I must use Andre' Maurois' masterly presentation on this theme.

> "Poetry in a wide sense, I conceive to be a transmutation of nature into some beautiful form, made intelligible by the introduction of rhythm. In poetry, in the stricter sense, this rhythm is

1. Bradford, Gamaliel, "As God Made Them", Page 218

2. " " " " " " Page 220

> established by the verse form or by rhyme; in music by the motif; in a book by the recurrence, at more or less intervals of the essential motifs of the work." [1]

He believes that a human life consists of just such motives. For example, in his "Life of Shelley" he brings out the water motif as the predominant symphony of his life. Shelley spent most of his days by the water's edge. Maurois is too fine an artist to omit any scene from Shelley's life that has for its setting those romantic ripples and splashes that he loved so well. The zenith of Maurois' Art shows itself when he chooses for a fitting climax the squall which wrecked Shelley's tiny craft. His sympathetic understanding of those loved ones waiting anxiously for the news and then the tragic end of what was once a great poet brought to shore in a lifeless, ghastly heap--in these gripping scenes Maurois makes us feel the tender melodic strains usually only audible to musicians, he makes us see rare beauty in a form entirely new to us, he paints pictures of life and tragedy worthy of a Millet.

In the following sentences picked from the chapter entitled "Ariel Set Free" the art of Maurois is seen in all its glory. Notice the water motif about which we discussed in the last paragraph:

> "Between two and three o'clock the Ariel sailed out of the harbour almost at the same moment with two feluccas. Trelawny re-anchored sullenly,

1. Maurois, André, "Aspects of Biography", Page 63

furled his sails, and with a ship's glass watched the progress of his friends..." 1.

" 'Maybe she will soon have too much breeze,' remarked the mate. 'That gaff top-sail is foolish in a boat with no deck and no sailor on board...Look at those black lines and the dirty rags hanging on them out of the sky, look at the smoke on the water! The Devil is brewing mischief.'" 2.

"....A storm was visibly coming from the Gulf, and he perceived that the Ariel was taking in her top-sail. Then the haze of the storm hid her completely." 3.

"When, twenty minutes later, the horizon was in some degree cleared, Trelawny and Roberts looked anxiously seaward in the hopes of descrying Shelley's boat amongst the many small craft scattered about. No trace of her was to be seen.

"On the other side of the bay two women waited for news. Mary was uneasy and depressed. The excessive heat of the summer frightened her. It was during such a summer that little Willie had died, and she looked at the baby in her arms with terror. He seemed certainly in the best of health; nevertheless, standing on the terrace gazing on one of the most lovely views in the world, she was oppressed with wretchedness. Her eyes kept filling with tears, she knew not why."... 4.

"Five or six days later Trelawny, who had promised a reward to any of the coastguard who should send him news, was called to Via Reggio, where a body had been washed up by the sea. It was a corpse terrible to look upon, for the face and hands and those parts of the body not protected by the clothes had been eaten away by the fish. But the tall slight figure, the jacket, the volume of Sophocles in one pocket, and Keat's poems in the other, doubled back as if the reader, in the act of reading, had hastily thrust it away, were all too familiar to Trelawny to leave a doubt on his mind that this mutilated body was any other than Shelley's."..... 5.

Maurois shows the greatness of his artistry when he names his last paragraph of his life of "Disraeli"

1. 2. 3. 4. Maurois, André, "Ariel The Life of Shelley", Page 321

5. " " " " " " " Page 326

His Favorite Flower. Here, the flower motif makes a decided impression on us. As we finish the life of this venerable lord, we are made to feel the great part that the primrose played in Disraeli's happiness. The taste left with us is a pleasant sweet one--we love this great statesman all the more for that gentle tenderness of his heart. The following paragraph is exemplary of the poetic charm of this last chapter:

> "Anxiously the Queen followed the sickness of her old friend. Several times she proposed to come and see him, but the doctors had fears that the visit would excite the patient overmuch. She wired from Windsor every day for news: 'I send some Osborne primroses and I meant to pay you a little visit this week, but I thought it better you should be quite quiet and not speak. And I beg you will be very good and obey the doctors and commit no imprudence.' She saw to it that the sick-room was always provided with primroses and violets. The invalid's eyes fell with pleasure on these lovely bunches with their pure tints. When Victoria was setting off for the Isle of Wight, she sent a messenger, again, with flowers, and a letter. Beaconsfield was too feeble to read this himself; he turned it over in his hands in embarrassment, reflected a moment, and said, 'This letter ought to be read to me by Lord Barrington, a Privy Councillor.' He had always likes traditions to be observed. The Privy Councillor was sent for: 'Dearest Lord Beaconsfield, I send you a few of your favourite spring flowers....' How apt it was, this blend of solemnity and pastoral poetry, to the bedside of the dying Disraeli! " 1.

In Strachey's works, too, all of the qualities numerated above can be easily detected. In Trevelyn's great work or in Lockhart's masterpiece, you get the impression that after all, their writings are but document-

1. Maurois, André, "Disraeli", Page 362

ary bits of statistics. On the other hand, the reaction experienced after reading Mr. Strachey or Mr. Maurois is decidedly different. You feel that you are in the midst of a piece of art.

These latter biographers are just as exact historians as their predecessors were, but because they are true artists, they present their writings in this new perfect art form--the biographical novel.

Mr. Strachey and his small group of equals have had many imitators. Even the Victorian artists had their long list of proselytes with the same disastrous results, for the imitators usually lack learning and discretion.

Mr. Desmond MacCarthy presents this view in an interesting and striking fashion when he says:

> "The manner of Macaulay was soon discredited by imitators who had no learning to support it; Mr. Lytton Strachey, too, has not been blessed in his literary descendants, the majority of whom ape his methods without understanding his discretion. The form he made fashionable is one which requires the finest literary tact and minute research." 1.

In conclusion, even a hurried perusal of the biographical novels mentioned should convince the incredulous reader of the artistry employed in planning those masterpieces.

1. Maurois, André, "Aspects of Biography", Page 10

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE PERSONALITY

Good Modern Biography satisfies our appetites for intellectual enjoyment in a much higher fashion than does biography of the past. It makes no difference whether we use for example, Plutarch's characters of the Greek and Roman World or Vasari's painters of the Rennaissance period. Not discounting their skill as biographers, we must admit, after examining their methods of presentation, that something is entirely lacking in their works. Their heroes never appear to us as complete men. They somehow lack the lifelike qualities about which we moderns are continually expounding. The cause of this deficiency is that the complexity of man's personality is entirely absent from their picturizations.

On the other hand, a good modern biographer strives to present to the reader the complexity of the subject's personality. To what this is due is still conjecture. However, we may offer several plausible explanations for this phenomenon. Modern Science initiated modern thinking. Even the high school boy in the physic's class now discusses with his teacher the new theories about cells and atoms that are no longer a single unit,

but are made up of small individual bits of complex matter. In college this same lad goes to the psychology class and hears his professor declaim on the complexity of human behavior. He hears that the same man possesses the qualities of goodness, badness, smartness, dullness, and is in short, a composition of varied intricacies held together by a delicate covering which is so thin, that at times, it appears quite invisible except to the keenest student of human behavior.

In an age such as this where the biographer and the public have been trained in the same school of psychology, philosophy, and science, is it not to be expected that great figures will be presented in the manner in which twentieth century men view life? The significance of all this is--that the complexity of the personality must be adequately stressed in every modern biography, otherwise, the portrayal will fall below our standards of approval.

The centuries preceding this modern school of thought were peaceful and simple ones for thinkers and writers. The human mind to them was a relatively easy affair. Characters in fiction could quickly be stamped as, honorable, domestic, fickly, brutish, lovable, and so forth. An examination of earlier biographies reveals

heroes that could be easily classified as to their characters. The modern biographies, because they strive to present complete portraits of men show the diverse characteristics of their subjects. In "Disraeli", by André Maurois, we see not only the cynic, but we learn that the real man deep down inside was as shy as an adolescent youngster.

Another aspect of this complexity of character is that the same man appears different to every invididual. For example, take that multitudinous character, Lord Byron. To some he was a demon, a cur, whose passion could not be curbed. But to Shelley he was a great English poet. Have we forgotten, so soon, Shelley's thoughts after his first visit to Byron? How he worshipped that man and his art! Probably he was a beast, but was he not something else too? Of course, he was. No need to give more examples, all modern thinkers now accept the proposition that a character does not react the same to everybody. Walt Whitman sums up this point very well when he says,

> "Do I contradict myself? Very well, I contradict myself, I contain multitudes." [1.]

The field of history has undergone a big change since the advent of the scientific method of thinking. There is not a level headed thinker of the present generation who will use and shout something that savours of this

1. Maurois, André, "Aspects of Biography", Page 3

following nonsense, "The Civil War was due to one fact." "The cause of the French Revolution was this." No--Modern historians know those conflicts originated from many causes. Some of them, indeed trifling, but nevertheless importantly contributory. Contemporary history books about the American Revolutionary War are so different than those written years ago, that an uninformed reader might mistake them for two entirely different periods.

So in biography, too, in order to understand the man, we must examine all of his different tendencies. Most of us now accept the axiom that a man is not all good nor all bad and that the same man changes as he goes through life. Many a man begins life with a blank and questionable character but as he develops he changes; and the young rascal often becomes the kindliest old man. Needless to expatiate--the reverse occurs just as frequently.

This acceptance of complexity of character is only a recent contribution to modern psychology and the biographical hunter should not expect to find heroes treated in this fashion in books of the past generations.

As late as the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries the acceptance of man as falling into the single character category was duly accepted. Without hesitation, we can exclude from this class, Shakespeare. His masterly knowledge of human nature is still to be equalled by modern writers.

Investigating the background of biography more carefully we can unearth several apparent causes for this obdurate continuity of moulding characters to form. One that helped to contribute to this damaging influence was the importation of the French Memoir into England in the seventeenth century. Everybody caught this infection from the returned English exiles and soon followed an avalanche of memoirs and private journals.

Thanks to posterity, most of these were never printed for public sale. Then followed the innovation of the character sketch which was so popular in France in the same period. The English writers did not adopt them from the Continent but drew directly from Tacitus and Theophrastus. This latter writer rightfully called Aristotle's successor, is the author of, "Ethical Characters", which piece of work was translated by Casaubon into Latin in 1592. The importance of Theophrastus is apparent when we learn that his style of character por-

trayal was imitated by as many as fifty-six writers in the 17th century, two of the most popular volumes being, "Characteristics of Virtues and Vices", by Hall, and "Characters on Witty Descriptions of the Properties of Sundry Persons", by Thomas Overbury.

This wide spread adoption of the method made popular by Theophrastus has another direct cause for the retardation of the continual development of Biography. Mr. Nicolson says,.....

> "it led biographers to fix upon a certain quality or type, and subsequently so to adjust the details as to fit them into the thesis or frame selected." 1.

Clarendon's fine piece of historical writing--"History of the Rebellion", is marred by this same method. He, too, imitated the style of his times with this same disastrous result. His composing of characters is well done but because he is not interested in the individualities of each character, his work sinks into a portrayal of ethical qualities rather than separate personalities. He lacks individual psychology but succeeds admirably in treating his historical characters as ethical types.

It is surprising but, nevertheless, true that this notion of the changeless man had many strong supporters as late as the nineteenth century. However, with the

1. Nicolson, Harold G., "Development of English Biography",

arrival of the great Russian writer, Dostoievsky, the complexity of the human personality was once more stressed. And now in representative Modern Biography we find this valuable quality in all its essence.

In Strachey's masterly handling of Queen Elizabeth in "Elizabeth and Essex", the complexity of character is shown in true artistic form. The dilly dallying of the Queen, her apparent fickleness, her pet weaknesses, her hard and tempered disposition, her cruel commands given to cover a sensitive streak--is this not enough complexity to show the modern trend?

In Strachey's "The End of General Gordon", we again find the author trying to understand the working of that eccentric soldier's brain. The following extract illustrates the point in discussion:

> "But the Holy Book was not his only solace. For now, under the parching African sun, we catch glimpses, for the first time, of Gordon's hand stretching out towards stimulants of a more material quality. For months together, we are told, he would drink nothing but pure water; and then...water that was not so pure. In his fits of melancholy, he would shut himself up in his tent for days at a time, with a hatchet and a flag placed at the door to indicate that he was not to be disturbed for any reason whatever; until at last the cloud would lift, the signals would be removed, and the Governor would reappear, brisk and cheerful." 1.

1. Strachey, Lytton, "Eminent Victorians", Page 264

Mr. Bradford in his artistic character studies takes cognizance of this intricate characteristic of man's personality. The following sentences are snatches from his study of Gustave Flaubert:

> "The truth is, the man's intelligence and his emotions were at war, as so often happens in this fighting world. The emotions were all pity for human folly and incompetence and, if you like, baseness. But the uncompromising intelligence demanded always that life should be other than it is. He was a thorough-going idealist and, as with so many of that type, the idealism soured into pessimism because it could never be satisfied." [1.]

As a fitting end for this chapter, I shall quote André Maurois.

> "What is true of man, as of all natural phenomena, is that he is subject to certain rhythms. Sometimes he is more especially conscious of his complexity; sometimes, on the other hand, he realizes that he has no social value unless he can impress a unity upon himself, even though it be an artificial one. At this particular moment of his history it is the feeling of complexity which is dominant....." [2.]

1. Bradford, Gamaliel, "Bare Souls", Page 256

2. Maurois, André, "Aspects of Biography", Page 33

THE IMPORTANCE OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

In every conventional presentation of the subject of biography, the lecturer or writer always includes the fascinating topic of autobiography--and he rightly should. It is not because I am conventional that I am devoting one complete chapter to autobiography, but rather because I consider it a necessary aid to the understanding of biography.

- The first autobiography published that merits attention is that frank, dispassionate account of his life by Benvenuto Cellini. This extraordinary picture of a life never yet duplicated in any age was begun in 1558. Benvenuto was the son of a disappointed rich Florentine. His father wished and prayed that his son would some day become a great musucian, but this recalcitrant offspring showed more love and adaptability for delicate metal work than for the art of melody; and so to keep a family from becoming bellicose, the son was permitted to engage in his chosen calling. At the impressionable age of fifteen Benvenuto was apprenticed to a goldsmith. He became a master in gold and silver metal work; probably the best known of his creations is Perseus holding the head of Medusa.

Cellini's famous metal creations are so well known as to afford him a niche on the pole of great men. But the reason we have spent so much time with him in this chapter is because he wrote what is considered by some authorities as the greatest autobiography in the annals of all literature.

In this masterpiece, we have a perfect picture of Italian life in the sixteenth century. His style is exquisite. You get the impression that the author is writing a life story about a third party. All the murders, loves, thefts, hatreds, schemes, plots, intrigues are described with such vivid and rich detail that at times you are shocked by the startling confessions of the rogue. It is a story of cold blooded exploits handled in the appropriate manner. Miss Hyde calls it, "one of the most brazenly criminal in all literature." [1.]

The following extracts taken from different parts of the book show conclusively the general flavor of the story.

> "The plague went dragging on for many months, but I had as yet managed to keep it at bay; for though several of my comrades were dead, I survived in health and freedom. Now it chanced one evening that an intimate comrade of mine brought home to supper a Bolognese prostitute named Faustina. She was a very fine woman, but

1. Maurois, André, "Modern Biography", Page 17

about thirty years of age; and she had with her a little serving-girl of thirteen or fourteen. Faustina belonging to my friend, I would not have touched her for all the gold in the world; and though she declared she was madly in love with me, I remained steadfast in my loyalty. But after they had gone to bed, I stole away the little serving-girl, who was quite a fresh maid, and woe to her if her mistress had known it! The result was that I enjoyed a very pleasant night, far more to my satisfaction than if I had passed it with Faustina. I rose upon the hour of breaking fast, and felt tired, for I had travelled many miles that night and was wanting to take food, when a crushing headache seized me; several boils appeared on my left arm, together with a carbuncle which showed itself just beyond the palm of the left hand where it joined the wrist. Everybody in the house was in a panic; my friend, the cow and the calf, all fled. Left alone there with my poor little prentice, who refused to abandon me, I felt stifled at the heart, and made up my mind for certain that I was a dead man." 1.

"The Pope had sent me all those precious stones, except the diamond, which was pawned to certain Genoese bankers for some pressing need he had of money. The rest were in my custody, together with a model of the diamond. I had five excellent journeymen, and in addition to the great piece, I was engaged on several jobs; so that my shop contained property of much value in jewels, gems, and gold and silver. I kept a shaggy dog, very big and handsome, which Duke Alessandro gave me; the beast was capital as a retriever, since he brought me every sort of birds and game I shot, but he also served most admirably for a watchdog." 2.

"I returned to the Loggia, whither my Perseus had already been brought, and went on putting the last touches to my work, under the old difficulties always; that is to say, lack of money, and a hundred untoward accidents, the half of which would have cowed a man armed with adamant." 3.

The significance of this unusual narration is that it is a perfect autobiography. It does not try to

1. "Benvenuto Cellini", Page 49
2. Ibid. Page 98
3. Ibid. Page 369

present to the reader a lovable, almost saintly personality. It does, however, perform the function of autobiography--it tells a true story about a personality in a straightforward manner. Here one finds no deliberate effort to portray one side; to shade a period or enhance an episode. Despite the ghastly feeling experienced while following the intriguer through some of his bloody exploits, you are convinced, without a doubt, that these exploits are true.

Making a long but hurried journey back to the land of the Pilgrim Fathers, we discover another autobiography that deserves honorable mention. This one is Franklin's "Autobiography", published in 1791. So great a narration is it, that every year finds added editions in the book market. It would not be exceeding the bounds of good decorum in judgment of books if I called it the greatest piece of work in American autobiography. This volume can be read and reread with great profit. Each sitting shows more clearly its vitality, its breadth of wisdom, its richness in practical philosophy. The one objection to its claim for perfection is Franklin's tremendous stress on the practical things of life. He is very much concerned with gaining a living, saving money, getting ahead in the world. Perhaps, Franklin could have given more time to spiritual values? But was he not

telling the story of his life, and was it not deprived of material things for long durations of time? His style is simple and straightforward, and he is just as frank with his faults as he is with his virtues. Indeed, it is a great book and I heartily recommend every boy and girl in America to read it. The practical hints of life contained between its covers are good guide posts for our Youth to follow.

The following extracts from Franklin's "Autobiography" show the sincerity, honesty, and moral rectitude of the man. Throughout the narrative this search for the ideal life is predominant. The first paragraph shows Franklin's quest for self-improvement.

> "This library afforded me the means of improvement by constant study, for which I set apart an hour or two each day, and thus repaired in some degree the loss of the learned education my father once intended for me. Reading was the only amusement I allowed myself. I spent no time in taverns, games, or frolics of any kind; and my industry in my business continued as indefatigable as it was necessary. I was indebted for my printing-house; I had a young family coming on to be educated, and I had to contend for business with two printers, who were established in the place before me. My circumstances, however, grew daily easier. My original habits of frugality continuing, and my father, having, among his instructions to me when a boy, frequently repeated a proverb of Solomon, "Seest thou a man diligent in his calling, he shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men," I from thence considered industry as a means of obtaining wealth and distinction, which encouraged me, though I did not think that I should ever literally STAND BEFORE KINGS, which,

however, has since happened; for I have stood before FIVE, and even had the honor of sitting down with one, the King of Denmark, to dinner." [1]

This paragraph below reveals very nicely the function of autobiography--namely, to tell a true story in a straightforward manner.

"I began now gradually to pay off the debt I was under for the printing-house. In order to secure my credit and character as a tradesman, I took care not only to be in REALITY industrious and frugal, but to avoid all appearances to the contrary. I dressed plainly; I was seen at no places of idle diversion. I never went out a fishing or shooting; a book, indeed, sometimes diverted me from my work, but that was seldom, snug, and gave no scandal; and, to show that I was not above my business, I sometimes brought home the paper I purchased at the stores through the streets on a wheelbarrow. Thus being esteemed an industrious, thriving young man and paying duly for what I bought, the merchants who imported stationery solicited my custom; others proposed supplying me with books, and I went on swimmingly." [2]

Another notable volume is, "Father and Son", by Sir Edmund Gosse. This volume appeared in the market in 1907. The reading public was shocked. It was not prepared for such a frank confession of intellectuality. Perhaps, we should be reminded that Victorianism only passed into the history books as late as 1921.

Sir Edmund Gosse at the time of publication was considered an authority on the Art of Biography. He had contributed to the Encyclopedia Britannica an exposition

1. Montgomery, D. H., "Autobiography by Benjamin Franklin", Trent, W. P., Page 84
2. Same as 1. Page 78

on biography which he calls, "the faithful portrait of a soul in its adventures through life."

Great moral courage is displayed in this book, otherwise, no such unfettered examination of one's self could be possible. Here is lucidly written the contrast of two distinct different periods--The Victorian and The Modern--or as Mr. Nicolson says, "the age of belief and the age of reason; the death struggle of Puritanism in its battle with science." [1.]

The appearance of this book created a decided sensation. The large reading public was as inadequately prepared for its reception as it always is for any intellectual innovation. Most of his contemporaries were still writing volumes in commemoration of the deeds of great men. Disregarding the methods of his associates, Sir Edmund Gosse produced an entirely original piece of work. Mr. Nicolson is reluctant to call this book biography. He says, "Still less is it an autobiography; it is something entirely original." [2.] However, for our purposes it can admirably be classified as autobiography.

The book is really a narration of mental differences. Sir Edmund Gosse tells the story of the clash of

1. Nicolson, Harold G., "Development of English Biography", Pg.143
2. Ibid. Pg.146

wills, of the intellectual blindness of his father which defect finally leads him to see his own cherished hopes destroyed. This fascinating account of mental differences the author relates in a gentle, ironic, and jocular strain. After reading the book we feel, that "Father and Son" is a masterpiece, in which by consummate power of selection the author has been able to combine the maximum of scientific interest with the maximum of literary form." [1.]

The motive that impelled the author to give to the world the intellectual struggles of these diverse periods probably was his desire for expression--he wanted to give to the world a true copy of what transpired in that period. It was, in truth, a personal conflict between his temperament and that of his father. Fate had bestowed upon Sir Edmund Gosse the rare opportunity of being a witness to the clash between these two distinct ages.

The following extract is a good example of the great qualities that this book possesses:

> "I was docile, I was plausible, I was anything but combative; if my Father could have persuaded himself to let me alone, if he could merely have been willing to leave my subterfuges and my explanations unanalyzed, all would have been well. But he refused to see any difference in temperament between a lad of twenty and a sage of sixty. He had no vital sympathy for youth, which in itself had no charm for him. He had no compassion for the weaknesses of immaturity, and his

1. Nicolson, Harold G., "Development of English Biography", Pg.148

> one and only anxiety was to be at the end of his spiritual journey, safe with me in the house where there are many mansions. The incidents of human life upon the road to glory were less than nothing to him.
>
> "My Father was very fond of defining what was his own attitude at this time, and he was never tired of urging the same ambition upon me. He regarded himself as the faithful steward of a Master who might return at any moment, and who would require to find everything ready for his convenience. That master was God, with whom my Father seriously believed himself to be in relations much more confidential than those vouchsafed to ordinary pious persons." [1]

The reader will observe that the language is extremely clear and simple, the portraits very accurate, the descriptions fair and unbiased--are these not worthy virtues in an autobiography? Occasionally, ho oversteps the boundary lines of convention which was very embarrassing to him, but in so doing, he felt that he was giving to the world something that it needed and lacked. Through sheer grit and courageous persistence he doggedly kept at his task until this superb intellectual masterpiece was finished.

A recent autobiography that deserves honorable mention is Harry Kemp's, "Tramping on Life". This book is hardly ten years old and has been read by hundreds of thousands of discriminating readers. Harry tells the story of his unusual life in language that grips and convinces.

1. Gosse, Sir Edmund, "Father and Son", Page 346

He presents a rare cross section of human life in a fair, honest and sympathetic way. Despite his horrid and suffering experiences, Mr. Kemp shows what a soul is capable of doing in order to obtain its ideal--it is a great moral builder.

We must admit that the author is a little eccentric but that does not detract our interest from the heart throbbing pages--it only accelerates the beat. The craving for expression is seen here at the zenith point. In addition to being a good psychological study, it contains a wealth of rich material about a section of American life very rarely exposed to the hustling multitudes. The book covers much varied ground, offering all kinds of interest to all classes of readers. Needless to continue this panegyric--my only advice is to read this extraordinary tale.

Heywood Broun, in the "New York World", says,

> "'Tramping on Life' is one of the most enthralling of modern autobiographies.....It is a beautifully simple prose.....In addition to simplicity, the book possesses frankness to a high degree.....Many an autobiography has been ruined by those twin curses, tact and reticence....Kemp just blurts everything out. He reveals himself to an extraordinary degree and yet as we read it, it seemed exactly what he should do."

Almost every page is filled with unusual and interesting experiences. To choose one incident that outshines the rest of the stars in his firmament of events is indeed an almost impossible task. However, the poet's "royal" entry into college besides being typical of Harry's "Tramping on Life", is humorously entertaining.

> "While at Mt. Hebron I had chosen German as my modern language. And it was a Professor Langworth's grammar and exercise book that we used as a text-book. Langworth, I learned from the title page, was professor of German languages in Laurel University, at Laurel, Kansas.
>
> "And now I bethought me that it would be much better to go to college in Kansas than attend the University at Chicago, where I felt, education was made an industry, just like pork-packing, and the hundred other big concerns in that city. Kansas would encourage individuality more, be less appallingly machine-like.
>
> "The great, roaring city bewildered me, and the buildings of the University of Chicago (for I got as far as to ask for the registrar's office) overwhelmed me with their number. And I fled. With the exception of a few days I put in washing dishes in a restaurant there, I stayed no longer, but freighted it southwest to Kansas City.....from whence I rode a freight further to Laurel.....
>
> "In the evening twilight I climbed out of a box car in the railroad yards at Laurel.
> I enquired my way to the University.
> 'Up on the hill'.
> I veered off the main street of the town.. ..a length of marching telegraph poles and flat-roofed Western houses. I struck across lots in the cold and dark. I floundered through half-hardened puddles of mud, over vacant lots that afterward seemed to have been conjured up for my impediment by some devil of piquaresque romance.

"The hill, the very top of it, I had laboriously attained. On all sides the college buildings gloomed in dusky whiteness of architecture.

"One of them was lit inside with the mellow glow of electric lights. As I stepped into the vestibule timidly, to enquire my way to Professor Langworth's house (for it was his I decided to seek out first), a group of fragrant, white-clad girls herded together in astonished tittering when they saw me. And I surely looked the tramp, dusty and soiled from my long ride.

"I asked them the direction to Langworth's house, but they ignored me, and scattered. Turning in confusion, I ran into a man-student bodily..... excused myself....the girls, standing further off, tittered again.

"'Can you direct me to Professor Gustav Langworth's house?'

"The student looked me over curiously. But he was of the right sort.

"'Certainly. Come with me. I'm going that way. I'll show you where it is.....' "[1].

Good autobiographies are even rarer occurrences than good biographies. In order for the former to be classified as good, they should be ACCURATE and TRUE. Boiling the points of view down to a precipitate, we can without much contemplation point to at least six causes why most autobiographies do not succeed as true portraits of their authors.

The first cause that rushes against us to support our contention is the unreliableness of our memories. Needless to emphasize--we do forget. Most of

1. Kemp, Harry, "Tramping on Life", Page 231

us only have a vague recollection of our childhood days. In fact, our lives up to six or seven years of age must always remain a mystery as far as our plannings, thinkings, impressions, and general outlook on life was concerned.

Some of the geniuses mock at us and tell us that they can remember many incidents of their childhood. Tolstoi could recall that at the tender age of six months he was put into a wooden tub to be washed. Perhaps he was born with an aversion for bathing. However, for most of us, our childhood, at best, is perhaps a series of a few impressionable incidents. Can a man at sixty record happenings so far back and be accurate? I challenge this feat. To confuse the champion further, the stories and events told to him of this trying period by his immediate family is to be questioned as to its veracity. I have never yet discovered a family that was not soaked in exaggeration.

We keep forgetting all through life, but because we have made more concrete associations in our mature period of life, we have the faculty of quicker recall. Yet, I venture to add that even a description of an event that took place only five years ago would prove rather troublesome to most people; and indeed, after a

burdensome trial, it may even be filled with inaccuracies. If many writers in this field did not use their diaries as a reference book in relating events, very few autobiographies would even be authentic.

The second defect which is inherent in autobiography is the apparent tendency of the writer purposely to forget many things in order to make his volume a masterpiece of art. It would be stupid and difficult to write about everything that happened in a man's life in addition to being boring and too long for the general reading public. What does the autobiographer do? He chooses the most vital events, the most interesting, and the most picturesque. If he is a delicate writer, he weaves them into a homogeneous whole that conveys the impression of an extraordinary life. He purposely omits the tediousness, the plateaus of his life where nothing unusual occurred. The reader rarely observes that he is reading a man's whole life in three hours. He only notices the remarkable career, the wonderful life of accomplishment and achievement. I am not belittling a great life, but I do wish to stress that in every great man's life there are days and days of humdrum monotony which the writer consciously refrains from relating. Because of this human failing to stress the dramatic; autobiography fails to record a life

in an unbased truthful manner.

The third reason that keeps autobiography from being accepted as a faithful account of a man's life is the natural psychological functioning of a normal mind to censor what is distasteful or uncomplimentary to it. Who is so brazen as to relate an incident that is shameful and embarrassing? Is it not the simplest thing in the world to tint a bit here and lighten a shade there? Is it not possible to partially acquire the habit of the interior decorator? Lo, and behold, what happens, but a life that did no malice; experienced no stupidity, always doing the right thing when it should be done. So we must record that memory and censorship can wreck a man's truthful portrayal even though he ventures forth like a Don Quixote to do the right thing.

A man's natural sense of shame prevents him from disclosing his real sex experience. Only in extreme rare cases does a writer possess enough courage to hint or show in which direction his sex life went. And is this not an important part of a man's life? Has it not made as well as unmade many men? The autobiographer in this instance is like the artist who writes for escape, for self-expression; he pens not what actually transpired

but what his innermost desires are. While the novelist is conscious of his creations, the autobiographer is not; he writes his wishes and nearly always believes them to be true. Thus we recognize another failing in autobiography.

Rationalization is still another function which does damage to autobiography. Where can the man be found who does not rationalize? It may be a human failing that modern psychology will be able to eradicate--but as yet it continues unknowingly in many men's minds and most noticeably in the autobiographers'. After an event has happened, is it humanly possible for a man to give the exact causes that made him act in a certain manner? Isn't he most liable to add high motives and subtract low ones? Consciously or unconsciously this is actually what is done. How could a general relate in his memories the many minute details of a battle, when as a matter of fact, nearly all battles are just a mess of chaotic carnage? This is, no doubt, due to the leaning of mankind to tell things in a fashion that they cherish. Modern psychology in its experiments has proven the following facts:--we do what we want to do, we see what we wish to see, and we write about those things that are nearest our hearts.

Another obstacle in the path of autobiographers

is the instinctive desire on the part of the authors to protect their fellow men who were associated with them during their life time. Many a volume contains a faithful record of the author but is spoiled by a sugar-coated description of his companions. There has existed for centuries the myth that one's friends are sacred, and nothing but their holiness should be shown. How can an autobiography be authentic with this noticeable defect?

Jane Carlyle once remarked,

> "if I might write my own biography from beginning to end, without reservation or false coloring--it would be an invaluable document for my countrywomen in more than one particular. But decency forbids!" 1.

In concluding this chapter, may I add, that autobiography will continue to be written and be absorbed by an enthus iastic public. In as much as some men seek expression through the printed page, others will eagerly seek to satisfy their curiosity--this is as it should be.

However, we should read autobiography with a sharp discerning eye. In addition to being fascinating and instructing this form of literary exposition will always remain a valuable source of information for biographers.

1. Maurois, André, "Aspects of Biography", Page 166

QUALITIES ESSENTIAL TO A BIOGRAPHER

If biography can be considered a work of art, and indeed, I have tried to prove it such in a preceding chapter; a sensible procedure would be to examine first, the quality dominant in artists in general, and then finish our discussion by revealing the most outstanding characteristics to biographers in particular.

The desire for expression seems to be the most powerful force that urges the artist onward to complete his handiwork. I believe even the Missourian will admit this. The artist may be a composer, painter, a sculpter, a novelist, or even a biographer. Something starts swelling within his sensitive frame, his pulse quickens, and to escape the pains of suppression he seeks to express himself in the most appropiate manner.

The novelist will consciously create certain types whose souls and hearts he lays bare with a fervid passion. Many a hero in a novel is but an escape for a novelist to tell parts of his own life to the world. If an author has unduly suffered in the hands of society, his hero will invariably reveal the terribleness and hardness

of mankind. Oftentimes, there is a moral theme winding its way like a narrow stream, not in the foreground, but nevertheless following its course and fertilizing the setting. We feel its presence and become refreshed and made better by it.

The sculptor carries in his mind an image that grows clearer and clearer as days pass. Soon, the passion for deliverance arrives. The desire to make a statue like the image is paramount in his frail heaving body. He cannot quench the rising storm. The result--a work of art. In like manner, all artists, no matter in what avenue they seek escape, experience the same surging emotions.

This should be equally true of the biographer if he expects to succeed in consummating an artistic masterpiece. But in one respect he finds himself subjected to a more difficult task than the other artists. We must never forget that his pursuit is one of a veracious nature. He deals with truth--documents, journals, reports, diaries, and other facts, are the threads that he must wind into a representative whole. Despite this apparent obstacle, the biographer can feel intensely like the artist. It is not necessary that he be a living

duplicate of his subject. He should, however, feel keenly about the same things that his hero did. It should be for him a means of expressing similar feelings like those experienced by his subject. For a biographer to choose a man whose feelings and passions are not in common with his own, can be compared to a captain starting seaward in a vessel that is unseaworthy--trouble is bound to happen.

In Autobiography we stressed the fact that because the author cannot detach himself from his work and give us an unemotional presentation of his life, it is apt to be filled with many inaccuracies. I hope I am not broadcasting the impression that the biographer must imbibe a mysterious magic fluid which will make him as emotional and unrestrained as the autobiographer. What I mean to emphasize is this, "The one thing essential is that beneath an objective surface there should lie that vivid emotion which gives the book an intensity, a burning passion, which a work written in cold blood can never have." 1.

André Maurois believes that a biographer is capable of feeling just as deeply and keenly about his subject's life as the artist does while creating his piece of art. As an example of this reaction, he frankly confesses

1. Maurois, André, "Aspects of Biography", Page 117

his mental turmoil before penning those two biographical masterpieces, Shelley and Disraeli. Petit André had just left the "Lycée" and was overflowing with philosophical and political ideas. One day a volume on Shelley passed into his hands which he devoured voraciously. He experienced a keen emotion, for in this book he found Shelley expounding to his friend, Fogg, those identical ideas that were dear to his own heart. André had suffered in like manner from the childish and unsophisticated undertaking of trying to apply his philosophical teachings in a world that was material and unsympathetic to logic and ideals. In his heart he began to store up feverish emotions to expose this cruel heartlessness of the world.

Here we see the author seeking for deliverance. As time passed, Mr. Maurois determined to write a novel which would explain to this callous world the case of Shelley, Harriet and Mary. The result of this battle with self is naively expressed in André Maurois' own words:-

> "I actually wrote the novel, but it was not a good novel and my Shelley continued to torment me. Gradually I read everything that had been written about him, all his letters, all letters written by his friends, and at last I took the plunge. Was I right? I don't know. I don't think so. I don't like the book any longer. In my eyes it is spoilt by an ironic tone which came from the fact that the irony was aimed by myself at myself. I wanted to kill the romantic in me; and in order to do it, I scoffed at it in Shelley,

> but I loved it while I scoffed. Good or bad, the book was written with pleasure, even with passion; and now I think you will begin to realize what I understand by biography considered as a means of expression." [1]

Maurois further on in his confession relates his new cravings and his new yearnings. There were many philosophical questions to be solved before his mind would find ease. What was the solution of life for him who was at heart a fervent romantic? After all, Shelley passed to his great renown at the youthful age of thirty. What course should he follow after thirty, and perhaps to old age?

One day "Lady Chance" directed him to an article written by Maurice Barres, who stated that Disraeli's life was without contradiction the most absorbing and most interesting one of the past century. Immediately he procured several representative volumes about this great Victorian statesman. Then to satisfy his intense cravings, he ravishly read all the memoirs of this spoilt period, finishing his diligent search by absorbing the novels and correspondence written by the unparalleled Disraeli himself. The more he delved into this thrilling life, the more apparent it became to him that in Disraeli he had found his next hero. This new character symbolized for him the romantic who only through necessity became a

1. Maurois, André, "Aspects of Biography", Page 122

man of action in a world that worshipped the God of Pragmatism. But this hero, despite the influence of the world of practical affairs, remained at heart a romantic- even to his last breath.

Mr. Maurois had no particular affection for the youthful Earl of Beaconsfield with his eccentric and showy attire. It was for the matured Disraeli, the Disraeli who found himself meanly attacked by inferior fighters in an unsympathetic world, it was the wonderful grit, the superior courage of a real fighter mixed with a tender heart and sympathetic soul admirably suited for husbandry--these were the qualities that Mr. Maurois loved, admired and worshipped.

This reaction told in Mr. Maurois' own words is interesting and informing:-

> "I almost felt that it was through him that I learned, without ever having felt it myself, the meaning of old age and of the approval of death--a piece of hard and inevitable schooling. At the same time, I felt through Disraeli I could express a political doctrine which was exactly what I was seeking--I mean a democratic conservatism, a combination of a great respect for tradition and for all that humanity has accomplished in the past, with a care for the happiness of the multitude and a desire for orderly reform. Being unable, for very many reasons to lead a life of political activity myself, I took a passionate pleasure in joining in the struggle by donning the mask of a face that appealed to me." 1.

1. Maurois, André, "Aspects of Biography", Page 124

I inserted this interesting and liberal confession in order to impress this desire for expression as of paramount importance in a good piece of art. Of course passions and feelings will vary with temperaments. Never will the biographer feel in exactly the same degree as his subject--nor is it possible or necessary. If at times, he receives mystical messages and experiences, even fleeting pangs of emotion akin to his hero--this is sufficient. Above all, he must understand and feel that the longings of the one being portrayed were human.

Mr. Strachey wrote his startling biographies in order to give vent to stored up emotions, but his intellectual conflict was the reverse from that of Mr. Maurois'. Let us not forget that this drive for expression may be one of sympathy or it may be one of antipathy. You will recall that in the first chapter I made known the fact that Mr. Strachey was entirely out of sympathy with the period he exposed--the Victorian period. Yet he gave to this generation several volumes of biographical art that will live on and on. It was his aversion towards this hypocritical and untruthful age that caused him to react so strongly against it. In order to liberate himself and ease his mind, he exposed this shady period of English History in a manner breathing with satire. The

most important phase of every biography is that the biographer should have experienced the emotional urge for expression before even penning his work. To record in a cold blooded manner a mass of facts in chronological order is to leave the heart and soul out of the man being portrayed. This leaves the reader with impressions of documents rather than an interpretation of a life.

In the biographer's mad dash for expression and freedom he may overstep the bounds of authentic limitations and color up his work with exaggerations and unauthenticities. This is not an uncommon occurrence among biographers and should be unhesitantly condemned--it is a breach of biographical ettiquette. Above all, the biography must be authentic. It is not a novel. When a record of a man's life is offered to the public it should be a prima facie evidence of veracity.

One very significant question now looms on the horizon. Can this unquenchable thirst for expression be combined with truth? I say, "Yes", and so do several of the best authorities. André Maurois says in this regard,

> "....but it does seem possible in certain rare cases, if the choice is fortunate and well suited to the author's temperament, that the biographer may be able to express some of his own feelings without misrepresenting those of his hero." 1.

1. Maurois, André, "Aspects of Biography", Page 132

In many cases the gap between the biographer and the life he is penning is indeed wide. This cannot be avoided. We cannot wait for another Shelley to pen his life, nor can biographical seekers be delayed in their satisfaction while posterity plays guard to entrap a new Napolean to reveal the life of his prototype. These hypothetical suppositions are beyond the boundaries of good reasoning--most of us will admit. The occurrence of similar characteristics in the writer and of the portrayed is almost unknown. Yet if there is not any meeting ground for these two different personalities it is almost impossible to conceive the finished product as being a life like interpretation. The biographer like André Maurois must become at times a Shelley in order to feel as that romantic poet did--for if he didn't, how could he express those delicate romantic feelings? A much better biography will ensue from a pen whose master has had at times some kindred passions than from one whose master never even experienced the slightest companionship with the hero.

Some historians condemn this method because being schooled in facts and details at the expense of art they feel that many untruths will inevitably be the result. Without doubt, this method in the hands of

fumblers upholds the reasoning of those scientific historians; but in the deft and nimble fingers of supreme biographical artists the result will invariably be a masterpiece. The human personality is so complex, as we have already learned, that no other way at present can make the hero relive his life for the benefit and enjoyment of the reader. André Maurois says in regard to this method "There is only one argument in its favor, but that is all--powerful, there is no other method." [1.]

Another important aspect of the biographer's method is the problem of morality. This is partly due to the peculiar qualities that biography possesses. Since biography tells a true story about the accomplishments of a great man who actually lived, the reader's emotions are more deeply stirred. The account of a successful man's doings makes him instinctively feel that if he tried to do his best, he, too, may accomplish more. No one can contradict the contention that we rise from a biographical sitting with greater strength to carry on the daily struggle of life. It is this vital point that the biographer must treat with discretion. If he is a moralist like Carlyle, he will spoil his work by consciously sprinkling morality through his exposition. Even if certain phases of a life call for no religious formula,

1. Maurois, André, "Aspects of Biography", Page 132

the biographer who assumes the role of moralist usually cannot resist the temptation to make his hero a religious man on these unreligious occasions. The biographer must not be a judge of morality. This belongs to the field of ethics. The most the biographer should do is to hint at moral judgment. It is a well accepted aphorism that a man too much occupied in ethics loses his sense of aesthetics.

We must not forget that every kind of art arouses us morally. When we listen to a symphony, we are stirred, we feel our passions being moved; when we see a beautiful picture, we react accordingly. If we read a novel, certain forces palpitate within us. it is not necessary that the biographer should constantly call the attention of the reader to the morality involved. He should not be a judge. That is outside the scope of his field. When he attempts to prove something, he usually finishes his task by proving nothing. Yet moral themes can run through every biography. When we listen to a touching piece of music, no one need inform us of the theme. If it is one of love, we can feel the pangs, yearnings and rewardings in the strain of the music itself. The same is true of great biography. The story itself should be powerful enough to move our passions for higher things. A moral aim should never be purposely inserted in a biography. Rather, we

should feel the trumpet heralding us to nobler deeds from the very fibre of the story itself.

Another necessary tool that a biographer should be able to wield nicely is style. Fashion is the essence of apparel. Modern advertising informs us that taste is the thing to look for in cigarettes; but in any piece of literary work, style is what gives it its flavor and permanence. Style and style alone determines the literary value of a book. Many volumes are invaluable for their informatory material but it is style that stamps a literary outburst as a classic. If a novel charms us, it is because of style. All the great masters of literary endeavors were supreme stylists. To go into the details of style is the scope of literature. However, I shall briefly hint that style is but the personality of the writer translated into print.

If Plutarch's "Lives", Boswell's "Johnson", and the rest of the retinue of unforgettable biographies have endured the strains and cracklings of the ages to become now part of our intellectual fibre, it is because of style. It is the style of the biographer that gives a piece of writing the stamp of longevity or premature death. The immediate popularity and wide acclaim of

Mr. Strachey's books and Mr. Maurois' is due to their style. They are, I believe, the two supreme biographical artists of our generation. They did not startle us with new original facts, but they did charm us, yes, even amaze us in the manner in which they told an old story in a new way.

The accumulation of facts for the biographical recorder is only the first step. To present to the reader only a mass of this statistical data will not give a biography a long life. Gamaliel Bradford consummates admirably this idea of classic biographies in the following words:-

> "And the biographies that live are those in which the material is fused; transfigured, glorified by the imaginative intellect of the artist, working with the instrument which we call style." 1.

All artists have to beware of the many pitfalls into which they are liable to be entrapped. Several of the outstanding dangers common to biographers are (1) gossip, (2) excessive background, and (3) irrelevance.

Gossip has done its share to spoil many an otherwise unusually good piece of biographical writing. The biographer must not insert all the gossip that he can dig up. This not only detracts the reader's mind from

1. Bradford, Gamaliel, "The Art of Biography", Saturday Review of Literature, Vol.I No.45

the main current of thought but annoys him terribly. Sainte-Beuve said, "Rien ne vit que par le détail". The detail is necessary, in fact, cherished, but the biographer must choose his detail most discriminately. He must sift and select. He must only add what is significant, omitting what is trivial. The unschooled biographer thinks he enriches his book by inserting anecdote after anecdote. On the other hand, the artistic biographer weighs each bit of detail carefully and only after a cautious procedure does he insert a sub story.

Excessive background is most conspicuously found in those biographies that have for their titles "Life and Times". The novice wants to show a background replete with many events. The result of thickly padding the background is to obscure the subjects. The hero should always occupy the predominant position in every biography. Humorously enough, it may sound, but nevertheless true, that in some volumes disguised as biography, the hero is occasionally mentioned. Sir Sidney Lee substantiates this point precisely in the following extract taken from his speech "The Perspective of Biography" delivered to the English Association, September 1918.

> "But it is the art of the biographer sternly to subordinate his scenery to his actors. He must never crowd his stage with upholstery and scenic apparatus that can only distract the specta-

> tors' attention from the proper interest of the piece. If you attempt the life of Mary Queen of Scots you miss your aim when you obscure the human interest and personal adventure, in which her career abounds, by grafting upon it an exhaustive exposition of the intricate relations of Scottish Presbyterians with Roman Catholics, of Queen Elizabeth's tortuous foreigh policy. These things are the bricks and mortar of history. Fragments of them may be needed as props in outlying portions of the biographical edifice, but even then they must be kept largely out of sight." 1.

Many biographers are guilty of irrelevance. This frequently happens when the author fails to understand the soul of his hero. In the words of the laity--he falls short. To cover his failure he dodges the real issue--the portrayal of the man. And instead of writing about the man, he tells about his connections, his relationships, his career, his ties, conveying all the implications deduced from such a procedure. In this class of pitfalls the biographer apparently never felt that inner drive for expression. His work was just another book of information added to the thousands already clotting the dusty book shelves of our libraries. Again, we must insert for emphasis, that the soul of man is such a complex thing to depict, that only the truly great biographical artist can complete his job successfully. Mr. Bradford's comment on this subject is precisely our point of view. He says,

> "More biographies have been spoiled by this sin than by any other because it is one especially liable to beset the biographer of genius." 2.

1. Lee, Sir Sidney, "The Perspective of Biography", Page 18
2. Bradford, Gamaliel, "The Art of Biography", The Saturday Review of Literature", Vol.I No.43

All of these dangers which lurk continally on the biographer's path to harass him are usually found together. Rarely do we discover one or two by themselves. This state of affairs very frequently is the result of a biography being too long. Brevity is of paramount importance to all pieces of literature. Especially, in this hurried and lack of time age, brevity is essential to all modern biography. Not discounting the charm, fascination and importance of many lengthy biographical volumes, brevity in biography is its first step to undying fame. As life becomes more pressural and more hurried, the reader has less and less time for self-indulgence in reading. The author must, at present, and more so in the future, do more and more of the work for the reader. With the greedy "Robotic" printing presses saturating the market with books, it becomes clear that for a volume to have a receptive audience, it must be brief. This means the biographer must not insert more irrelevant material than is absolutely necessary to bring out his point.

Sir Sidney Lee in that remarkable Leslie Stephen Lecture which he delivered in the Senate House, Cambridge, on the thirteenth of May 1911, sensed this impending danger and informed his distinguished audience of its terrible consequences. In his words:

"More than ever at the present day is there imperative need of winnowing biographic information, of dismissing the voluminous chaff while conserving the grain. The growing habit of ephemeral publicity, the methods of reporting the minutiae of prominent peoples' daily life, not merely by aid of the printing press, but by the new mechanical inventions of photograph, phonograph and even cinematograph, all accumulate raw biographic material in giant heaps at an unprecedented rate. The biographer's labours will hereafter be immensely increased; but they will be labours lost, unless principles of discrimination be rigorously applied." 1.

As a fitting conclusion to this chapter, I quote Mr. Bradford again:

"The biographer must have the keenest critical judgment in the use of his materials. For instance, his work must necessarily depend in large part upon the report and record of others as to the character he is studying. He must be able to analyze this record, to allow for the possibilities of error, to estimate the varying credibility of the witnesses he is dealing with, to throw out some with remorseless disregard, to use others with the greatest discretion and reserve, to recognize that there are still others upon whom he can rely with confidence and who may even form largely the basis of his narrative. A nice discrimination of this sort in the case of testimony is as rare as it is absolutely essential for biographical purposes." 2.

1. Lee, Sir Sidney, "Principles of Biography", Page 41

2. Bradford, Gamaliel, "The Art of Biography", "The Saturday Review of Literature", Vol.I No.43

IMPORTANCE OF BIOGRAPHY

The past five years have witnessed a deluge of biographies on the market. Next to fiction, biography interests more people than any other form of literature. This is due to a variety of causes which we shall now investigate.

The one that bellows for immediate attention is that we are all interested in mankind. What story is so eagerly received as that one that brings news about a human soul? There is a certain kinship that runs through all humanity that is as strong and enduring as the rock of Gibraltar. This desire for human news is more than mere curiosity. It springs from an innate desire to learn the tricks of success from a successful man. Everyone's life penned usually deserved merit, otherwise it would have been lost to oblivion. Successful and great men plod their way to the front through methods entirely their own. The rest of humanity are also vainly reaching for that golden dome. It is in biography better than in any other place where they can discover the formula that may turn the tide in their favor. Sometimes a suggestion, a help, a hint, or illumination is sufficient to reward the anxious reader for his perusing. Again, a pointing out

of a fault later conquered convinces the blasé reader that he, too, with a little concentration can overcome this deficiency and then heave on to success. As long as man lives on this earth, he will look for inspiration in Biography.

Another conspicuous reason for this enormous popularity, is the enjoyment biography offers to the public. People want to live a long and varied life. With life becoming more tense and competitive, the opportunity for long living and varied living is gradually diminishing. Where can people turn to for this desirous pleasure? The weary civilized slave, in order to relax his shaken nerves must turn to biography for this denied enjoyment.

In biography the ambitious person can live more than one life. He lives vicariously as many lives as he can afford to read. Some days he cruises the seven seas visiting the distant strange lands. Other nights, he jaunts on the back of a camel over hot desert sands just escaping death in the hands of the Bedouins. Sunday afternoon, our diligent reader may enter the private study of some famous preacher and discuss morality and philosophy in a pedantic style. And so there is no end to the variety of vicarious living he can do. Mr. Wilbur Cross

humorously and rightfully says, "Biography is thus a sort of Life Extension Bureau." [1.]

Where psychology will fail to inform a man about human nature, biography will succeed. For those students who find the fundamentals of psychology too ethereal, a substitute requirement should be biography. In these enticing volumes the student can follow the actual workings of many brains. Their plannings, doings, retreatings, counterings and rewardings can be studied and understood and lavishly enjoyed. If more people would make biography a habit, there would be less antagonism in this world. They would have a good working knowledge of that subtle thing so necessary in this hurried age--human nature.

The interpretation of any period of our civilization is brought to us more clearly and more forcefully through biography than through any other agency available to mankind, including history. The Italy of the sixteenth century is not understood until we read Cellini's masterpiece. Pepy's Diary--a form of autobiography--gives us a picture not obtainable in any other book of the Court of Charles II. We may read many books on the French Revolution, but it is only after we have vividly followed the tragic adventures of Marie Antoinette as penned by that

1. Cross, Wilbur, "Yale Review", October 1921

inimitable master Hilaire Belloc, that we begin to realize the terribleness and horribleness of that bloody era. It is the subtle use of our imagination vicariously employed in the biographical volumes that gives us that realistic vivid touch so necessary in the interpretation of any period.

The racing importance of biography in literature carries with it many important outcomes of great importance to our teachers and our schools. Today biography has established for itself a renowned position in American life and letters. Until very recently a person of culture and of fine education possessed hardly more than ten volumes of biographical writings. Indeed, this amount was considered an adequate representation in any library. Today such a display of biography in any modern library would be called meagre and inadequate.

The law of supply and demand is a good index for understanding the causes behind any movement. This economic formula can be nicely applied to literature. The Christmas number of one of our leading magazines in 1919 devoted enough space in its advertising columns to make known to the public the publication of twenty-five new biographies. In 1924 in the same month this very journal

announced the arrival of fifty-three new biographies. In 1925, there were published at least eight biographies of Napoleon, six of Woodrow Wilson, and seven of Lincoln. Despite the fact that the biographies carry a higher price than most of the other forms of literature, the demand contined to increase. This conclusively shows that the number of readers are keeping pace with the production.

Every teacher in our school system, especially, the English teacher, should call on biography as often as it is conveniently possible to emphasize a point, clear up a situation, or enlarge the meaning of a period. Because of the fascinating qualities of biography, teachers can successfully assign readings to the new high school students to bridge that gap so often experienced by students after leaving the Junior High School.

Our colleges have not been entirely immune from this rising popularity of biography. In 1919 the educational world experienced a decided novel sensation when a chair of biography was created in Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota, electing as its first professor, Dr. Ambrose W. Vernon. As far as records reveal, this is the first move of its kind in the United States. The significance of this is not only the establishment of the

chair, but that recognition of the trend of the times and an earnest endeavor to meet it. A thorough search through catalogs of other universities reveals chairs of biography in Dartmouth and in Wittenberg. In addition to this, many universities have inaugurated courses on biography.

The literary world, at present, is attempting to formulate the principles of the art of biography. A recent important contribution to this field was made by William Roscoe Thayer who was awarded in 1918 the gold medal for biography by the National Institute of Arts and Letters. Mr. Thayer's small but significant volume, "The Art of Biography" will be found invaluable to searches of this biographical art.

Commemoration is as old as mankind. Long before those Egyptian pyramids were massed together, temples of gigantic size and unsurpassed splendor were built to perpetuate the glories of kings and queens. Many of these testimonials of the lavishness and splendor of antiquity have disappeared with the ravishes of Time. If Plutarch had not preserved in his immortal "Lives" such picturesque details of these ancient heroes, civilization would be much poorer in knowledge of this Classic era. Enormous sums added to literally thousands of lives were used to

erect those massive, luxurious palaces and mausoleums of antiquity. Today, nothing but eternal soil stands testimonial where once reigned the height of beauty and extravagance.

The only permanent commemoration known to mankind is the blessed printed word. Biography should have for one of its functions the perpetuation of the lives of a country's famous men. This has been done by private parties but in an altogether unfitting, haphazard manner. To commemorate the illustrious dead who have accomplished great deeds should be the prime duty of every nation. It should establish a department that has for its function the writing of every notable man's life. This is the only permanent means that a nation possesses to preserve the records of its greatest citizens.

Sentences like the following from that tireless and fruitful pen of Sir Sidney Lee show that this venerable biographer considered national biography as a priceless duty to be performed by the nation.

> "In a civilized state, no memorial of one who is credited by his countrymen with distinctive character and exploits can be rational and efficient unless it fulfill three conditions. It must be at once permanent, public, and perspicuous....." 1.

> "Monuments in stone or brass may preserve a man's name for two or three centuries, but little

1. Lee, Sir Sidney, "National Biography", Page 3

purpose is served by the preservation of a man's bare name." 1.

"Very potent must be the drug that can serve as antidote against the opium of time. Experience proves that only one prescription is of any avail. 'The safest way,' wrote Thomas Fuller, 'to secure a memory from oblivion is by committing the same to writing.' " 2.

"It is to the prosaic, yet more accessible and more adaptable, machinery of biography that a nation must turn if her distinguished sons and daughters are to be accorded rational and efficient monuments. Biography is of its essence public and perspicuous; it is no less certainly permanent." 3.

Biography serves still another unsubstitutional service for mankind. It offers the ordinary person an intelligent approach to the understanding of the world's art. It is an irrefutable maxim that culture--art, painting, music, architecture, and all of the other refinements of life--has always interested people. A corollary of this--a nation's degree of civilization is judged by its ultimate achievements in these fields. Biography is the one direct means to help the layman to honestly appreciate the significance of artistic creations. For, truthfully, how can we understand a man's work, unless we know something about the man, his life, his yearnings, and finally what prompted him to give to the world this tangible testimony of his unseen emotions. The Reverend Harry Emerson Fosdick makes a worthy contribution to this line of thinking when he artistically says:

1. Lee, Sir Sidney, "National Biography", Page 3
2. Ibid. Page 4
3. Ibid. Page 4

> "Poems are the quintessential expressions of life and you never fully understand them until you know the man from whom they come, his problems, developments, conflicts, ideals, handicaps, and ultimate philosophy." 1.

Last in this arrangement but not least in importance is the balancing virtue that it exercises over the average reader. In the many pages that he eagerly scans, he discovers the strong points and weak points of human life. He begins to take on a philosophical air that helps to center his life. Again, I call on Dr. Fosdick to stress this point with his language that has all the tinge of a sermon. He says:

> "It is not alone the endless human interest of this knowing men which makes biography so much worth while reading that there is; it is the steadying power which all this contributes to a man's life. Nothing can take him wholly unawares, if he knows wide ranges of biography. Life's successes are less like to turn his head and life's failures less likely to oppress his heart." 2.

1. Fosdick, Harry Emerson, "Blessed Be Biography","Ladies Home Journal",April 1924
2. Ibid.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

I have traced the development of biography from Plutarch to Strachey, resting just long enough at those points along our hurried journey to emphasize the trend in which it was heading. The brief history, I inserted, in order to give the reader a background for a fuller understanding of the exposition that was to follow.

I briefly, but comprehensively, revealed the most striking characteristics of contemporary biography which are; its search for truth, its evolution to a work of art, and the recognition of the complexity of the personality.

One chapter I devoted to autobiography because of its close relationship and relative importance to biography. In this presentation, I disclosed the points of merit, adding the natural weaknesses of autobiographical portrayals.

The essential qualifications necessary to a great biographer are found in one complete chapter. Here, I emphasized as of paramount importance, the desire for

expression, the significance of style and the necessity of brevity.

Lastly, I enumerated several of the important services rendered by biography, stressing such attributes as inspiration, clean enjoyment, vicarious living, interpretation of a period, and as a direct approach to Culture.

CONCLUSION

I believe Biography to be entering the threshold of a Golden Age. And it will continue to become better and greater despite the handicap that each age possesses of only producing two orthree truly great artists. This latter difficulty may be found in all of the arts--such is the way of creation.

With those distinguished volumes by Strachey, Maurois and Bradford topping a long list of biographical writings feverishly finished to satisfy the insatiable cravings of this modern literary world--I can only prognosticate one thing--a better civilization. When boys and girls, and men and women, willingly seek refreshment, relaxation and counsel from the illustrious men and women who have gone to their well deserved places of abode on

high, how else can I end my thesis except by quoting the invocation of Reverend Harry Emerson Fosdick, "Blessed Be Biography". Amen.

FINIS

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